

## ~ Day 111 ~

The tension in the streets was so thick you could taste it. This 'Executrix Lana' clearly held either immense strength or status to garner such fear within those haughty nobles.

I've yet to hear of any such name during my stay in Ebongrave. But to be fair, our group hasn't really socialized with the other monsters of this city, opting for simply getting our things done, and then get the hell out of dodge.

But then the question was; would she save us or was she just another adversary?

"So?" Lana droned out with her melodic voice. "Is anyone going to tell me why in the lord's name that monsters are instigating battle in the middle of the streets?"

"T-that commoner murdered my son!" The lizardman noble named Seth'rek finally bellowed, this indignation apparently greater than the trepidation that he felt for Executrix Lana.

She paused, seemingly thinking over those words.

I wanted to say something but honestly wasn't sure if my denying that accusation would do me any good at this point. But just as I was about to speak, Lana spoke up first.

"What proof of this is there?" She asked, her tone now unreadable. "No such fighting in the city has been reported recently."

The lizardman sneered as his clawed fingers picked at a purple gelded earring at his ear. Removing it, he presented on his palm for all to see, and when the sudden flare of presence radiated from the jewelry, I was shocked at what I could feel.

*"I was my aura signature?!"* I thought incredulously, the presence within that piece of intricate jewelry undoubtedly that of my very own aura.

However, it wasn't just my signature alone, there were multiple other signatures and sensations, almost as if it told of a story or a scene.

Of how I killed that noble...

That piece of magical ingenuity was beyond anything I could've thought of, and its intricacies remained a mystery, but it was unmistakable proof of me killing that noble.

I could only curse my shitty luck for that lizardman shitstain to have that ludicrous amount of magical items on his person, and even one that would take any to the grave with him if they were to become his killer.

She turned her gaze from the nobles to us, and although her eyes were hidden beneath that cowl of darkness, the piercing look she gave us could be felt running down our spines.

Relaxing my posture as best I could, I faced the intimidating woman.

"Journeying down into the Abyss for some hunting after coming to this city looking for workers and then being suddenly assaulted by those prideful scions had been the least of my expectations, I must say," I stated simply, gauging if I could see any reaction in this Lana. "So yes, we did kill those nobles, but only so to save our own lives from their greedy clutches after they had summarily tracked us down and assaulted us."

"I see." She nodded.

"Nonsense!" Seth'rek hissed, indignation written all over his reptilian face. "No noble would dirty their hands with the filthy blood of commoners, especially not one of my household."

They killed my second-eldest son, and now accuse him of being the instigator and tarnish his honor even in death?! What madness is spouting from this waste of air? They all have to be handed over to me right this instanc-

"Enough!" Lana suddenly exclaimed, cutting off the self-pompous monologue of the lizardman noble. "Seth'rek, although your household name is written onto the noble steele, that does not mean that you have any authority to make claims in the matters of jurisdiction."

Looking clearly offended, Seth'rek seemed about to retort but ultimately held his tongue.

Lana looked back at our group, but as she was about to speak, her gaze wandered from me to the robed figure of Mia. For one long tense moment, she just stood there, looking at Mia's cloaked form. She clearly saw something, but her reactions didn't betray her thought at all as I was left wondering if she knew what Mia was.

I was still keeping Mia being an Elder Drow a secret as the possible repercussions of revealing such a thing could become disastrous for us. If Mia being any normal Drow could make noble houses attack us in both contempt for her race's status and greed of her darkness-aligned core, then imagining how monsters would react when they learned of an unaffiliated Elder Drow running loose outside the city made me not even consider the option taking the risk.

But whether or not Lana realized what Mia was, she didn't give any other indication that she did.

"Normally, the crime of killing noble is severe - punishable by immediate execution," Lana stated, bringing me out of my thoughts as the air of the surroundings turning colder than frost at her now icy voice. "However, as no proof has been presented that the instigator of the crime had been done by either party, we've moved to an impasse. As such, the decision of punishment has been left to me."

I could feel the chill of her voice run down my back, liking this situation less and less for each moment that went by. The most infuriating part of it all though wasn't the injustice of us being attacked on our lives unprovoked by those damned scions and then being accused of the very same crime by their elders, but it was the fact that I stood in no position to rebuke the claims nor fight back.

I was simply not strong enough to be able to fight my way out of this situation. In the face of this executrix and the many other powerful nobles, I was unable to stand my ground, which pissed me off as nothing else had.

This feeling of being regarded as a piece, someone whose fate was to be judged and decided by others.

I hated it.

I despised every single bit of it.

I needed more - I needed more power.

To be able to forge my own life and destiny, unheeded by the strings of puppet masters and those stronger.

I needed power for that freedom.

This need unconsciously seeded itself deep within me to one day take root, but I was pulled out of my thoughts by Lana's voice before I could ruminate on it any further.

"As executrix of Ebongrave, I, Lana Eliador, sentence you to-" She proclaimed before suddenly cutting herself off.

Pulling up a glowing talisman from a pocket at her waist, silence once again reigned the streets as Lana seemingly muttered into this talisman, as if talking with someone.

"A *communication talisman*?" I wondered briefly, beginning to desire such a useful tool more than ever as coming into contact with your people had proven more than troublesome over the last month.

The atmosphere was fraught with tension, both sides awaiting whatever was going to happen next.

"It would seem you've been given an ultimatum," Lana finally said as she put the talisman back into her pocket, her tone impassive but firm and unwavering. "Execution by my hand right here and now, or trial by combat; those are your choices."

"WHAT?!" Seth'rek abruptly blurted out, the incredulity in his voice thick with indignation.

Ever since Lana had caught the lizardman by the tongue and silenced him, he had been seething in the distance, only being able to watch and listen as we were being handed our sentence. But now that we had obviously been offered an out for all this trouble, his bubble had finally burst.

"These commoners deserve worth than death! They've spilled noble blood, and they're being granted an opportunity to get away without punishment!?" He shrieked, joined by his fellow noblemen that also voice their many haughty protests.

"Seth'rek Sinlore, you will be held in contempt if you further challenge the ruling of those above your station." The executrix suddenly said.

As if slapped, the lizardman reeled back, now surprisingly silent. Before he had just been pushing his bounds in his incessant complaining and whining, but now he had clearly overstepped them and I couldn't help but smirk at his fearful expression, as if this had been wholly unexpected.

Turning my attention back onto the woman clad in black leather armor, I considered her words carefully, knowing that a lot of things were at play here that I still was all too unaware of.

"So what would the conditions of this trial by combat be? - what exactly would we be fighting for?" I asked, my face twisting into a perpetual scowl as I disliked just how orchestrated all this felt.

"The venue will be the tournament, held in five moons. Should you place amongst the top three, you and your followers will be pardoned of any charges."

"And if we don't place that high, will we then be executed?" I asked.

"No, servitude." She responded simply.

I paused, teeth clenching.

"To whom?" I ground out, my frown ever-deepening.

"The regent - city lord of Ebongrave." She answered.

I shook my head amusedly.

"I guessed so..." I muttered to myself, irritation and exhaustion washing over me.

If somebody of authority had the ability to completely overrule someone like the executrix here, then who else than the supreme authority of Ebongrave could do so? I still had no idea why the sudden interest in our party, but it was clear that the city lord for some reason or another had an eye on us.

Whether or not that was a blessing or a curse, that remained to be seen. But for now, there was still hope for us to get out of this sticky, and all-too-unwelcome situation.

"We choose the trial by combat," I replied.

"Fine," She nodded, and with the swish of her hand, another cowled and leather armored figure appeared next to her. "This is Alde. For now, you and your followers be put under the supervision of me until the beginning of the tournament. Alde will guide you to your new quarters."

Now that I had finally been looking, I realized a startling fact as this 'Alde' had appeared. They were very clearly of the same faction, their clothing being practically identical, but their strengths were distinctly different.

While Executrix Lana had appeared as if out of thin air, Alde had been less mysterious in how he appeared although he was almost as quick and hard to notice. But what one thing I really caught notice of, was the fact that he was a mage - and a dark one at that. But the weird thing was that I could barely even sense his core or any of the magical fluctuations around him.

That led me to believe that this Lana might not be as ordinary as simply a physical fighter either...

If he could disguise his core, would she not also be able to do so?

"An unknown group of mage assassins... yeah, I don't think I'll mess with that anytime soon..." I thought to myself, a bit disheartened, now wondering just how many of these powerful individuals might be lurking all over the city - hiding in the shadows as these two did.