

Chapter 231: Sisters

Morgana struggled to find a spot that was comfortable enough to sit on as she tested various spots across the deck of the ship called the Reliable. The snow and ice was fine, Bjorn would have killed the crew for not sweeping it away and keeping the deck clear, but everything felt either rotten or rusted and held together by little more than hopes and dreams. She could sense Soteria felt the same way from the Dragon's obvious frustration, but at the very least they had found Wicke, Morgause and the others.

Wicke returned back to the main deck with a cautious expression on her face as she looked at Morgana. "So... Jayce said you're here to help us with the Dungeon, but he wasn't willing to say why. So, no offence Morgana, why you? And where the hell did this... Dragon... come from?" Wicke questioned, glancing from Morgana to Morgause. "It's a punishment," Morgana stated firmly and clearly. There was no point hiding anything, it would likely come out eventually anyway. "Right..." Wicke said, somewhat dejectedly. "Okay, fair enough. Figures... Well you've been here longer than we have, have you seen anything worth mentioning? And you know we're going inside that Dungeon for at least a few weeks?"

Morgana nodded. "The outpost surrounding it is pretty well-maintained and secured, for so far north. Quite a few ships as well. But it's mostly open air, easy enough to drop into from above without much difficulty. Do you have food supplies? Healing potions?" Morgana returned. Cinderlee unfurled her hunched back, opening up the cloak wrapped around her to reveal an array of vials of various colours. "We have food, not enough for a Dragon, but at least enough for us, and you," Wicke stated.

Morgana glanced over to her Dragon. "Go hunt, fill your stomach. There should be magic stones to crunch on inside, but they'll probably be small for a while so make sure you're full," she warned to Soteria. The Dragon let out a grumble, raising several eyebrows from Wicke and Damian's crew. "Did that Dragon mutter something?" Damian questioned in distinct confusion and growing awe. "She does speak, but not often to strangers," Morgana warned. Damian's eyes lit up like a child being offered sweets.

"Focus Damian," Wicke stated, snapping her fingers as Soteria took off into the cold air. "Magic stones shouldn't be an issue," Wicke stated, creating a sizeable purple stone in her palm. "Huh?" Morgana uttered. "Oh yeah, we learnt how to make them in the Dungeon. I'll show you in a moment. Can you get us inside?"

We're trying to keep a low profile after last time." Morgana smiled. "Not a problem."

Wicke scratched her head as Morgana revealed the plan, eventually walking away below deck. Somewhat unsubtly, the rest of the deck then began to clear, other than Damian, who was too foolish to notice what the rest of his group were doing, and Morgause. "So..." he stated. "You two haven't seen each other in... a long time, right?" Morgause glared at him and he raised his hands in defence. "Just a question."

"Damian," Morgana stated.

"Yes?" he returned.

"Go away."

"Right..." he said awkwardly, standing up and slowly departing. Morgana then let out a sigh and looked up to the grey skies above and the snow continuously falling from it. "I didn't think I'd see you again," Morgause said quietly. Morgana let out a sigh. "I... I'm sorry. It wasn't anything to do with you. I just needed... to leave," Morgana stated nervously. Morgause looked at her feet, her shoulder-length silver hair covering her face. "I wish it had been a little to do with me..." she said quietly. Morgana stood up and sat next to her sister. "It was your home, your life, not mine – and I didn't want to ruin it, to take away from your happy family with my... not-so-happy... situation."

"You sound like Arthuria."

"Well that's rude and not true. You don't even know what she sounds like, you were a baby when the family collapsed and you are just making up what you believe she would say," Morgana scolded. Morgause glared at her out of the corner of her golden eyes. "Am I wrong?" Morgana pressed, poking the pauldron covering her sister's shoulder. "You know what I mean," Morgause returned. "You're acting like we're not family. Your problems were mine, they should have been mine, I'm your sister the same way Arthuria and Elaine are. We shouldn't have – you shouldn't have left me."

"My silver-wolf, I couldn't stay and I wanted you to have a normal life. One without a serial adulterer as a father and more half-siblings than you needed. I was just... a reminder to your mother, she couldn't really..." Morgana couldn't even believe her own words. The last encounter with Morgause's mother had been far kinder than she had hoped. "Now who's making stuff up?" Morgause

questioned, leaning into her older sister. "You shouldn't have left me. I just ended up following you anyway, only it led me to the Paladins instead of the Witches. I was this close to both you and Arthuria for ages."

"How do you know about that?" Morgana questioned. It shouldn't have been common knowledge. Morgause gestured towards the hold where Morgana sensed the rest of the group eagerly eavesdropping. "Damian," Morgause answered. Morgana couldn't help but think back to the endless questions the young man had during the brief time aboard the Stacked Hand after the war. "Of course." Morgana then turned on her sister. "That was stupid of you. Your poor mother and step-father, do you know how much they worry about you?"

Morgause rolled her eyes before standing up. Morgana stood up as well, only to falter as Morgause turned on her. She was younger, and of similar height, the pair of them distinctively shorter than Arthuria, and definitively shorter than Elaine, but Morgause was far from the skinny frame of Morgana. Morgause had brawn, and certainly the means to utilise it. "Forgive me for trying to find my sisters!" Morgause snapped. Morgana shied away slightly, before steeling herself and meeting Morgause's glare. "You could have died, little sister."

"So what? Better that than to never see you again! And all this time, you've been with Arthuria? And you didn't think to even... look for me?" Morgause said, the words catching in her throat. "I thought of you constantly. And once I heard that you were here-" Morgause's face darkened and she turned away, shaking her head. "Not even a letter? How long did you know for?" she questioned. Morgana didn't answer. "How long?" Morgause screamed.

"Morgause, I'm sorry."

There was a lot more Morgana wanted to say. A lot more she could have said. She could have spoken about Elaine being a Betrayer. The Sea Sovereign. Jayce. All of it, and just how much it meant for her little sister to be out of it, and away from the danger. But she knew that it wouldn't have helped. Morgause was not the little girl following her around anymore and, now that she was here, Morgana needed to be the sister Morgause had been craving.

Silence followed and eventually Morgause turned and met her older sister's worried eyes. "You owe me, big time," she stated plainly. Morgana nodded. "I will do what I can to make it up to you," Morgana sensibly appeased. Morgause pouted. "I want a Dragon." Morgana faltered. Morgause had never been above making childish and outrageous demands for appeasement. "Uh, I

will see where I can get an egg from," Morgana lied. Morgause nodded in approval, before swiftly grappling her sister in a bone-cracking bear hug. Morgana held her back, sipping in air where she could.

Morgana tossed a large purple crystal into the air ahead of her. Soteria lunged for the stone, crunching it loudly in her jaw before dive bombing through the clouds. She counted a few seconds, trying not to think of the miniaturised ship in her bottomless bag or its crew in a small crystal orb in her pocket, then dove after her Dragon aboard her broomstick. Gunfire rumbled beneath her, the guards stationed around the Dungeon most likely having never met a Dragon before. Their weapons rattled harmlessly against Soteria's forcefields as she casually strolled up to the huge metal doors and then forced them open. Morgana tucked in tight to her broomstick, twisting her body around the pole and barrel rolling into the Dungeon, in what most likely looked like nothing more than a fast and dark blur.

The doors shut behind Soteria as she followed after Morgana, meeting her at the bottom of the Dungeon stairs and in front of the metal gates that marked the true entrance. With a quick shatter, Morgause and the others appeared, taking in quick gasps of air as they were released from their prison. "I did not miss that," Wicke muttered, nodding appreciatively to Morgana as the broomstick vanished into her bottomless bag. "It won't take them long to rally up the courage to follow after the untouchable Dragon," Morgana warned, looking to Damian to lead. "Right, let's get this done then."

The temporary excitement of the Dungeon faded for Morgana after the first few hours. Wicke had been expecting the excitement to last for at least a whole day, but she knew Morgana was bored when she decided to simply stop walking and float alongside the group on her broom whilst periodically flinging out a spell in the vague direction of an enemy. "So... you've been doing this for how long?" Morgana eventually questioned, laying down on her broomstick and lazily floating back and forth as Soteria crunched on tiny magic stones. "Two years, there about," Damian answered, watching the Dragon in awe as they made camp. "Since you guys left for the Old World without us," he said with a hint of anger. "Not my choice," Morgana assured. "I'd have happily had some extra meat shields along for the ride, I mean the Beastly Boys are practically that anyway."

She smiled as she wondered what mischief they were probably up to. "Didn't Jayce send you here to help us?" Damian returned in frustration. "It seems you're just letting us do all the work." Morgana sat up, crossing her legs and peering at

him from atop her broom. "Well duh," she said with a grin. "I'm a Rising Ace." "Hey," Wicke called over. "So am I. And he's not wrong, you could help out a bit more."

Morgana rolled up her sleeve, revealing a patchwork of tattoos. "I am," she stated. "But for the real stuff you guys keep talking about, not these bugs or bats. Besides, Soteria is keeping you guys safe from harm." The Dragon glanced over in Morgana's direction. "Food?" she questioned aloud, jumping Enki out of his slimy skin. "I don't like that the beast talks," he muttered, oblivious to the faces pulled at him – the talking sea monster. "What?" he questioned.

Sleep alluded Morgana for quite some time. It wasn't that she couldn't sleep on the hard rocky floor, even with having gotten used to her luxurious bed she was still familiar with the lack of luxury from her time as a Daughter of Shade. She missed the rocking of the ship, the noise of someone somewhere doing something even in the middle of the night. She missed her friends, and the growing regret was continuing to build.

An arm slapped her forehead, Morgause's loud snoring right in her ear as she lay partially entwined with her. Morgana remembered agreeing to sleep near each other, but Morgause didn't seem to understand that had meant within the vicinity of each other, rather than having their bedrolls touching. Morgana sighed, the wet breath of her Dragon not exactly far from her head either. "I'm sorry," she muttered, before rolling away from Morgause, thinking of Arthuria's hurt expression the last time they had seen each other. Whether through conscious or unconscious decision, a pair of arms wrapped themselves around her, Morgause holding her tightly before burying her face into Morgana's neck. A slow smile briefly showed at the corners of her mouth, sleep eventually appearing as she lay in her sister's embrace.

Morgana dragged her wand across her arm, igniting a range of prepared spells she had marked on her skin before aiming them up at the stone colossus ahead of her. The spells peppered the gigantic creature, forcing it to raise its arms to block the spells before it staggered backwards. "Now!" she yelled, Damian, Sabine and Morgause all rushing towards the stone creature's left leg to strike with all they had. Morgause's huge sword crept through the large cracks that Sabine and Damian left in the leg, but the sword didn't do nearly as much damage as Morgana wanted and expected. "You can do better than that!" she yelled to her sister, the group retreating behind Soteria's shield as the creature recovered. "Where's your magic?"

"I don't have any! I'm not a Paladin!" Morgause returned. Morgana shook her head, riding high on top of her broomstick and observing the stone colossus for weaknesses. "Why not?" she yelled down, sending a deliberate and precise bolt of decaying magic into the wound on the monster's leg. "I never formed any vows, I don't have access to the tree of oaths!" Morgause yelled up, sliding under a heavy slam and striking back into the wound. "You don't need it! It's always been an illusion, a crutch! A Paladin's power is in restriction, in rules! It doesn't come from some magic tree!" Morgana yelled. She had known it for a long time, but had she said it in front of Jeanne she reckoned she would have been burned at the stake for her blasphemy. "Think on what you are trying to achieve! What do you need?"

Morgause looked up at the stone colossus. It had no emotions, it was only a literal stepping stone on her journey. She thought on what she needed: she needed strength, the strength to pull her family back together and to ensure that nothing could break them apart again. A heavy stone fist flung down towards her. Morgana dove down, grabbing the hood of her sister's chainmail and dragging her a few steps to the left. The fist slammed into the ground where she had been. Morgause raised her sword. She wanted to never be left behind again. "Don't just swing your sword! Use it!" Morgana yelled.

Morgause screamed, another fist swinging down towards her. She swung up, meeting the giant pillar of stone with her sword and parrying the strike, the huge arm going wide. A red glow swirled around her blade, the already-huge blade lengthening to become several times larger than her body length. Morgause then slammed the blade down into the colossus, cleaving downwards and liquidating the stone as it passed through the giant body. The giant body faltered before cleanly parting in two, eventually then fading into a cloud of white particles. A large and heavy magic stone rattled to the floor, only to immediately be snatched up by Soteria.

"You did it," Morgana said with a grin, landing next to her sister and patting her on the back. "I... did, didn't I?" she questioned back. "How did I do that?" she then asked. "That's for you to figure out, but whatever restriction you placed on yourself must have been significant to do that. I know you'll figure it out." Morgana turned and looked towards Wicke. "So, only a few more floors left, right?"

Morgana scratched her head as she looked at the large frozen tube in the middle of the dimly lit Dungeon control room. "So... that's a Wizard from five-hundred

years ago?" she questioned to Wicke. Wicke simply nodded, nervously looking up at the Wizard in brown robes and the crystallised Demon below him. "And we can wake him up?" she pressed, stepping forwards to stand by Wicke's side. "Wait a moment," Wicke told her. "I'll be back," she stated, pressing a button on the main console connected to the stasis tube. Wicke froze in place and Morgana immediately glanced towards the others in alarm. "Give her a moment," Damian advised.

"No, I'm not an intruder," Wicke immediately interrupted. "Yes, I've been in other Dungeons and I've already spoken to Alizia and Porthos. There's not much time, it's been five-hundred years and the Dungeon will collapse. Where is the Anvil of Agron?" Wicke bombarded. The pale figure with a few scraggily brown hairs on his chin and a ring of hair around his bald head looked at her. "Oh, well I appreciate the exposition, even if it is a bit sudden."

"Sudden? It's been five-hundred – you know, never mind. Oh great sage of magic, give me your wisdom," Wicke said, bowing to the middle-aged man in hopes he would answer before time ran out. "Hmph. Well the Great Forge is in its usual location. The south of the world. You're at the wrong pole. It is also at the peak of one of the great mountains." Wicke couldn't help but feel disappointed. "Oh, okay. Um, did two women who look like me visit you before I did?" she then asked, the plain white world around her beginning to shake. "Who?"

"Okay, well thanks anyway. Do you mind helping my friends and I out of here? I'm guessing you're going to say I'm out of time for any more questions." "Well, okay, fine. Did you not want to at least ask my name?" he asked, more out of annoyance than anything. "You're name is Therazar, I have access to the infinite library so I made sure to look you up beforehand," Wicke stated proudly. "Can't fault you there," Therazar stated.

Wicke stumbled backwards, a brown, earthy grimoire in her hands and a swirling sandy portal appearing in the floor nearby as the ceiling began to crack and the frozen tube shattered. "Nice!" she stated proudly, holding the heavy tome aloft. "Well?" Morgana questioned urgently. Wicke pointed to the sandy portal, the others leaping into it. "Come on!" Wicke stated, rushing forwards and leaping through. Morgana let out a sigh, glancing towards Soteria and then around the room. "So much we could have learnt... Come on, let's get out of here!"

They dove into the portal, rolling out across soft snow as the ground continued to shake and roar, the large white pillar that was the Dungeon quickly falling apart behind them. "Uh, Wicke?" Morgana questioned finding herself and Soteria alone, Wicke and the others already swiftly running away from the falling tower. "Oh come on!" Morgana protested, taking out her broom and quickly propelling herself into the sky as the Dungeon fully collapsed behind in a huge cloud of dust and snow.

"Where's Morgana?" Morgause yelled out to Damian and Sabine, Wicke, Cinderlee and Enki all hot on their tails. "I don't know, wasn't she behind us?" Damian returned, only to yelp as a hail of gunfire sprayed the ground by his feet. "Halt!" yelled a voice, only to disappear in the cloud of snow and dust as the Dungeon collapsed. "Come on!" yelled Morgana from above swooping over the group along with Soteria before continuing to fly swiftly towards the nearby water.

Guards rushed from the docked ships, all hoping to stop the clear perpetrators of the Dungeon's destruction, but a wall of clear barriers rose up to line the path to the water as Soteria defended the group. A faint flash of light caught Wicke's eye. "So much for not giving away our identities," she muttered. The Reliable crashing into the water ahead of them. Damian landed first, immediately rushing forwards to prepare the sails along with Morgause. With a heavy thud, Soteria landed, surrounding the ship with protective barriers as Morgana flew about throwing down spells at the Guild soldiers. "Get going!" she yelled. Wicke didn't need to be told twice. "Hold on!" she yelled, guiding the winds into the sails and propelling the ship forwards. "Where to?" Damian questioned. Wicke didn't know. "The Capital!" Morgause answered. "We need some supplies, and my sister is buying!"

"I didn't agree to that!" Morgana protested from above. "Anyway, Wicke, what did you learn in there? Anything worthwhile or was all that just for some old tome?" she questioned, flying alongside the ship until they were certain they had moved out of range of the Guild's cannons. "The Anvil of Agron is in the south. And my sisters didn't make it to the end of the Dungeon," Wicke answered. "Oh, well I could have told you that," Morgana answered. Wicke slowly looked towards her with an emotionless expression. "Sorry, didn't realise that was what you were after. Your sisters are in the Ancient World, somewhere in the place called the Scourge, but we don't know where. Jayce didn't find them when he was there."

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Marisha met Bjorn's lost expression, her hand gently touching his cheek. "It's too dangerous," he told her softly. "I don't want you to go." She shook her head. "There's no choice, it has to be done. I've worked so hard to make her better. I can't give up on her now, not when she could be such a powerful weapon against the Sovereign. I need to speak to my mother, to Holli and Myra, I need to destabilise the Guild – to take it away from Scáthach, and I can't do that here. I love you Bjorn, but you need to sort yourself out. I can't magically fix things, I can't bring back our boys, but we can damn sure avenge them. Astris and Arthuria need you. Jayce... he needs you too."

She stepped away and departed their room, leaving him behind in the dark as she strode quickly and confidently up to the main deck. "Are you sure about this?" Astris questioned, meeting her by the Gambit. Marisha nodded, giving Astris a quick hug. "Jayce is counting on us to have all our cards ready for when he returns. This is the best thing I can do for us, for the world. I'm going to pull my mother out of the Guild, and use the Syndicate to hurt it as badly as I can. Call for me when you need me, I'll be there." Astris nodded appreciatively, stepping back as Marisha clambered into the cockpit and the flyer was lowered down onto the ocean water. "Give them hell!" Astris called down. Marisha nodded, engaging the engines and launching the flyer forwards and up into the air.