

## 97 – Emily's Quests

The waters were choppiest on the return trip in the rowboat, but aside from being splashed a few times, we made it back to the port of Altar without anyone falling off our tiny vessel. We headed back to the Adventurers' Guild as a group, though Elye grumbled about being back in the city.

The many public servants moved about in their spotless white robes, lighting the city lanterns before it could get truly dark, setting Altar in a fascinating hue of shiny lights while the amber-stained clouds above slowly darkened with every passing minute.

By the time we reached the Guild in its bulbous wax-covered building, most of the sunlight was gone from the sky above.

“The sun sets much earlier here, because of the mountains,” Renji remarked.

Elye tapped the broad back of Ludwig and asked, “*Andasangare Luuvig, do you know Redmoss Enclave?*”

He grinned at her inability to properly pronounce his name and answered with a nod. “It’s a couple weeks’ travel north-northeast from Altar by carriage. Why?”

“*My father says I should visit them.*”

“Which Enclave are you from?” he wondered.

“*Skovslot Enclave.*”

“That’s the one near the border, within Harrlev, isn’t it?”

“*Can you take me to Redmoss??*” she insisted, ignoring his question.

“That’s a bit of a detour from Lacksmey,” he replied. “If we stick together long enough, I’ll introduce you to them. Granted, I’m not sure how they’ll react to an Elfin from a different Enclave. Redmoss people are quite reclusive, even by Elfin standards.”

Elye frowned. It was clear that her idea of freedom wasn’t as fun as she had thought, since she disliked the cities and towns we’d been living in.

“What’s an Enclave?” Emily asked and Renji immediately began explaining it to her, while Elye continually corrected him.

Meanwhile, I broke off from the group with Ludwig. “What are the last requirements you needed for summoning the Moonlight Dancer? I’m thinking I’d like to have both of these familiars summoned before I go on any Quests with Emily tomorrow.”

“Finding the proper grave for the Gjenganger ritual is gonna take a bit longer than that, but once I have the last two things, which the resident Librarian ought to possess, then we should be able to summon the Dancer tonight. One of the requirements is that the moon has to be out.”

I nodded. “Find me by the Quest Boards then, once you’re done.”

Ludwig clapped me on the back with a grin, then strode through the open doors of the Adventurers’ Guild, waving to Samael behind the counter, before heading for the staircase leading up to the For-Rent Armory on the first floor and Librarian/Genius hideout on the second.

I waited for my Party to catch up to me. They were still embroiled in a back-and-forth about Elfin Enclaves, with Renji making claims that Elye immediately shot down. Emily looked lost and trapped in-between the two and cast me a “help me” glance. I smiled, then said, loudly, “Let’s have a look at some Quests that Emily could take.”

Even though Elye wasn’t interested in joining the Guild, her ears perked up and she grabbed Emily by the wrist and dragged her over to the Quest Boards, while Renji and I followed after them.

“I still think an open Extermination Quest would be the optimal thing to start on. The sooner she gets used to killing monsters the better.”

“I don’t think so,” I replied. “She should have a gradual introduction to this world and its dangers. Throwing her into the deep end and hoping she can swim might do untold damage. Also, you want her to avoid Backlash, right? I feel like a life-or-death situation is the exact place where she could lose her head and ignore your warnings.”

Renji took on a pensive look, then said, “Damn, Ryūta, you really gave this serious thought. You’re totally right. I just figured if she did like me, then she’d grow really quickly.”

I stopped a few metres away from Elye and Emily, who were in the middle of looking at the many fliers on the boards, with the Spellhand reading out loud to the Elfin what each of them said, since she couldn’t understand the Native language.

“Wasn’t your start in this world terrifying?” I asked. “*I* was scared out of my mind.”

“In the beginning I sort of just viewed it as a really realistic VR game, you know. It wasn’t until the first time that I was injured that I realised that everything was real. Maybe it was a bit of a coping mechanism perhaps, but it did help me get over killing monsters, especially goblins, which seem just like humans in so many ways.”

I thought back to my first encounter with creatures. It was a memory still burnt into my mind. I didn’t feel guilty for their deaths, but seeing their bodies up close had made me understand that these were sentient creatures and it had made me sick to behold.

“The worst I ever had it was when the Healer in my party died because of my recklessness. It was shortly before my Spellhand friend lost his sight after blowing up a goblin stronghold. And you wanna know the worst part? I knew it was my carelessness and forceful decision to push forward that led to our Healer dying and my friend becoming a cripple... but no one blamed me for it.”

I put my left hand on Renji’s tall back.

“I practiced solo for a long time after that,” he then said. “*That* failure became a driving force for me to become so strong that I would never let such a thing happen again. But it wasn’t the last time my decisions led to someone dying...”


He took a deep breath, then grinned a little, perhaps to convince himself. “But I refuse to let my failures define me or drag me down. When my friend lost his vision, he gave up completely. I don’t ever want to end up like that.”

“What does he do now?” I asked.

Renji shook his head.

I knew my friend well enough to not pry.

“Ryūta,” Emily asked and I walked over to look at the flier she was pointing at. “Do you think I could manage this one?”

<i>‘Gathering Scarlet Vows’</i>		
<b>GATHERING QUEST</b>	<b>TYPE:</b> <i>Troublesome</i>	<b>RANK:</b> <i>Novitiate</i>
<i>The flower vendors in Altar have run out of the rare Scarlet Vow flower and are offering a modest payment for any freshly-plucked ones that are gathered for them.</i>		
		
<i>All flowers must be handed in at the Altar Adventurers’ Guild.</i>		

**REWARD:** 5 Silver Crowns per Scarlet Vow

The image that went along with the brief explanation was something that I only really saw on Gathering Quests, though rarely they were included on Bounty or Discovery Quest fliers.

I thought back to what Lukas and Rana had both told me, when we’d encountered the flower during the Exorcism Quest in the Margrave’s castle.

*I wish they were here... this would’ve been the perfect quest for Lukas.*

Taking in a lungful of air, I exhaled slowly to push away my dark thoughts, then said, “A Scarlet Vow is a rare flower that only grows in the wild. They’re used to symbolise love and are exchanged as a sign of romantic commitment, kind of like wedding rings I suppose.”

Elye looked confused about the mention of rings, but it seemed Emily had a similar cultural reference from Oblus, since she understood what I was talking about. I glanced to Renji, but he quickly held his arms up in an X.

“I never did many Gathering Quests,” he said. “They’re not a good investment of time for what little they pay. I’ve also never seen a flower like that in the wild.”

“The only place I know that they grow is in the south of Arley,” I continued. “Let’s look at what else is on offer.”

Emily nodded and went back to looking.

Most Gathering Quests were Novitiate-ranked, since they were all menial tasks that even Natives of the world could handle, sometimes much more efficiently than Otherworlders, but there were a few that were Initiate- or even Seeker-ranked, though that seemed to have to do with the gathering materials coming from a monster or being located within their territory. One such quest was for a type of fungus that grew on the back of a Stonetusk Boar, and another was for the seeds of a honeysuckle only known to exist within a grove, which was home to a goblin tribe led by a hobgoblin.

“What about Delivery Quests?” I asked, when I realised that most of the gathering quests were either too dangerous or centred on extremely rare flowers and plants. The Gathering Quests in Arley had been easier and more approachable. “We have horses, so those might not be a bad idea, right?”

“I’ve done a lot of Deliveries,” Renji remarked. “They’re great for picking up if you’re going in the same direction for a different quest.”

I wondered if that was how he’d gotten Argonaut, since he said it required a hundred completed quests. However, I was sceptical if that was *all* it took, since Owl, Harleigh, Charlatan Charles, and other people whose Guild Cards I’d seen hadn’t had the ability. I was fairly sure it wasn’t just a

hundred quests that was required, but no doubt also a time component, like: a hundred quests in thirty days. Knowing Renji, he’d definitely work himself to the bone for an achievement like that, since, despite having never actively taken part in sports nor being engaged in school work, he always managed to complete games in record speed, proving that he had the ability for incredible diligence, if his mind was in it.

I quickly scanned the fliers and found that there were at least three that mentioned the same destination: a small village on the outskirts of a dangerous forest. It was called Sacrament, which, from the name, made me think it was a pious place like Altar. As for why there were so many Delivery Quests there, it seemed to have to do with the forest making travel to the area extremely difficult for anyone except the most devoted or those escorted by guards. My guess was that Sacrament was a self-sufficient village like Troll Root near the border.

“Have you been there?” I asked Renji, pointing to the flier.

“Once, but only because I had a Bounty Quest in the forest for a man-eating Baneclaw that the Crown itself put a bounty on. I didn’t stay there long, but it’s a lot like Altar.”

“Maybe we should go there?” I asked Emily. “There are a few Delivery Quests for the place.” She nodded, easily convinced.

“If we’re going there, we might as well take *this*,” Renji said, pulling a flier off the board.

**‘Gathering Buzzing Rocks’**

**GATHERING QUEST**

**TYPE:** *Complex*

**RANK:** *Initiate*

*The Whispering Wilds near the village of Sacrament is the only known place to source Buzzing Rocks, which are stones within which a Rock-Burrower Wasp has lain its eggs. A Buzzing Rock is only worth something if it is still buzzing, as this shows that there is unhatched life within it.*



*The Alchemists of Altar and Evergreen make good use of Buzzing Rocks in various concoctions and is thus paying handsomely for each of these that they receive. Given that these are time-sensitive objects, deliveries can be made either with a Guild Representative or directly to an Alchemist in either city.*

*This quest may be accepted by a Novitiate-ranked Adventurer, if they are in a party with at least one Initiate-ranked Adventurer.*

**REWARD:** 7 Silver Crowns per Buzzing Rock

I looked to Emily, and she said, “Only if all of us are going.”

I nodded. “I agree.”

“What’d you think I was gonna do?” Renji asked. “Sit on my hands and wait for you to get back?”

“*I wanna leave this city!*” Elye exclaimed eagerly.

“Guess *that’s* that then,” I said.

Emily and I pulled the three Delivery Quests from the board and brought them with us to the counter, where a tired-looking Samael was balancing a pencil on his index finger.

“We’re like to accept these four Quests,” Renji said, placing the Gathering Quest next to the three Delivery ones.

The surprise made Samael jump and he dropped his pencil to the floor, before scrambling to find the soul-stone tablet for accepting quests.

“Do you need me to point you to the right tablet?” Renji asked, leaning over the counter to look at where he was scrambling around to find it.

“I’ve done this before, you know!” he answered, before knocking his head against the bottom of the counter. “Ow.”

After an undignified beat of silence, he slowly emerged from behind the counter with a wide black slate that had faintly-glowing sigils around its border. Emily, Renji, and I all handed him our Guild Cards, and he placed them on the tablet alongside each of the quests, taking them off after removing every flier, before putting them back on with the next.

“You know you can do them all at once, right?” Renji said, having a bit of fun teasing the young Clerk. I nudged him with my elbow, but he just grinned at me in that frustrating way only he knew how.

“What’s this? You lot bullying poor Samael again?” asked Ludwig, surprising Emily enough to make her gasp out loud.

“I have it under control,” Samael boasted, though it was clear he was very new and inexperienced.

After all the quests were accepted and tied to our Cards, Ludwig picked up the fliers and glanced them over, while Samael went to fetch the items we had to deliver, from the room in the back.

“Sacrament, huh? Good place to get Black Tallow Candles, if you go find Old Man Jakobs. Makes them himself from pigs’ blood. They might also possess some old Spell Tomes, as a matter of fact.”

“Really? How come?”

“Place was founded by those that Altar kicked out for being deemed ‘heretical’. Free thinkers more like it, if you ask me. They collect a lot of curios and trinkets, and are fairly tolerant of Summoners and Exorcists, given that we’re their main clientele. Though they also sell a lot to Fortress Major, of course. That being said, they made the moon-brained decision of building their village right next to the Whispering Wilds, one of the more dangerous places in this region, so be careful.”

“I’ve been to the forest before,” Renji explained. “I think Ryūta, Elye, and I should be able to manage any dangers we come across there.”

Ludwig nodded. “Good enough for me.”

With a huff of exertion, Samael placed a stack of letters, a wooden crate, and a cast iron saucepan onto the counter. “...These are the... deliveries,” he said between breaths.

Renji started grabbing all the stuff and putting them into his various bags, while Ludwig tried to get my attention by shaking a linen sack in front of me, before he said, “I got the stuff.”

The fact that *something* was dripping through the bottom and staining the floor purple, much to Samael’s growing dismay, made me apprehensive about what exact ingredients he had brought, but it was too late to back out now.

“Who wants to see a summoning under moonlight!?” the Incarnate asked, as though speaking to a kindergarten.

“Me, me, me!” Renji said eagerly, his excitement immediately infecting the Elfin, who started jumping around with him.

I shook my head, but couldn’t help but smile.