

MARAUDER

The dead have no need for possessions. No matter what fables the priestesses of the All-Mother spin, once the death comes, it's just things most often without anyone to claim them. And lucky for some of us, these things still have plenty of value to those still drawing breath.

My life was never easy. Few women can boast such luxury in the hard times that were dealt to us after the Calamity. For those of us not born with a silver spoon of nobility in our mouths, life is mostly death and filth. Death for the men, filth for the women. I had a lot of grief early and often. A lost child, an oaf of a husband who would come home staggering and smelling of mead that we had no money for. Driven into a rage by his own futility. No coin, no prospects. There was no one to blame but himself or me. And my husband was not big on blaming himself. So I suffered and my grief grew and my soul turned grey.

An aimless, violence-filled life of a travelling soldier suited him and so the conscription was a boon. I followed him as there was nothing left for me under the leaky roof in the small village on the outskirts of Aulstrad. He fought and I made extra coin by cooking, patching up wounds and collecting spoils left in the bloody aftermath of battles. He turned out to be lucky, my husband, and survived skirmish after skirmish, staying alive longer than many other soldiers we saw around the war camp. Killing for money made him vigorous, and the vigor brought more rage that he would share with me. And I suffered once more, though this time my bruises were accompanied by a steely determination to pay back.

When I was looking through the broken bodies left after the next battle, I heard his voice. Weak and rasping he called out my name. I found him in the mud, blood at his mouth, clutching at a grievous wound in his belly. The weapon tore through the weak chainmail and left a nasty gash. He was weak but he could survive. His eyes filled with hope as he saw my face, staring up at me with a dull smile of pained relief. There was no rage as I stabbed him in the heart several times. Simple payment for every time he laid hand on me. There was no anger, and I was all out of grief. He would be just one more body to search. Except I knew I wouldn't find much. Filth for the women, death for the men. And I was already covered in dirt.

I left camp several weeks after that and joined another one. War was plentiful but poorly equipped soldiers did not have much on them. It was then when I thought that perhaps the dead of higher stature would be a more lucrative target for my talents. Purchasing a hardy pickaxe I snuck in to a mausoleum of a wealthy family. Short work smashing open a few tombs was rewarded with fabulous discoveries! Finding a buyer for all this jewelry was not easy, but eventually they found a home. Now this was a life I could get used to, unconcerned by what limited superstitious fools would think of my methods.

Digging up a grave of a well-known adventurer I stumbled upon a rolled-up map of a cavern complex containing ancient and mysterious ruins. The many frenetic markings left on the map suggested riches beyond imagination. Leaving the cemetery, clasping the scroll, a plan formed quickly in my mind. I would venture to these tunnels and hire some muscle for safety and to make sure we can carry out all the spoils. Spoils like that would be enough to live off for the rest of my life.

Besides, as I always said – these are just things. The dead won't miss them.