

~ *The Light of the Undead* ~

It was known that the light had been around for as long as it was remembered, but there was a time when there was no light. Tales of those days were that the dead stayed dead and did not come back over and over. Stories were that the Lord of Death had given up on Humanity and that the Lord had cast them out of heaven.

Stories of the opposite were true too, that the Dead were given the chance to do something in another life, to remake a world and gain entrance to a new better world.

One story was the favourite of the living. There was a King of ages past, a tyrant and vicious man. The King ruled over the world with a hard and dark rule, men were killed for looking the wrong way, women were raped and burnt at the stake for sins only seen in his eyes.

It was said that he had a Queen, a girl he fell head over heels for and married her. He treated the girl like a Queen and hid her from the horrible world he ruled over. One day this girl wanted to see the world and she crept out of the Castle he had kept her in.

She saw the world and how torn and ruined it was, she saw how the people hated their King and what their King did to them. She had been blinded by the love he gave her.

She tried to help the people, but the people did not understand and murdered her, raped her and tore her to pieces. When the King found out he was furious, driven mad by grief he butchered millions in revenge, the gates to the afterlife were flooded with dead.

The King grew weaker in his rage, disease wracked his body and he fell ill. And one day, he died.

"No more!" Came the cry from the afterlife. "You whom are evil incarnate will never enter these lands, and those whom you have killed will never enter either! Your sins forever cast upon the world, your eyes will witness!."

Inside the Afterlife, the Queen saw her husband's fate, the fate of the people, she begged for them to enter, even if her Husband must stay outside, the others did not deserve the fate.

Death gave her a chance. A light to guide the holy and the just to the afterlife, a light to help those whom were falsely accused and those who followed after.

The Queen waited at the gates of the Afterlife, waited to see her King so she could try and save his soul, perhaps even give him peace.

That was the favoured tale of the Light of the Undead.

~ *No One* ~

"I see it again, within my eyes. I see it always, the lantern in the sky."

More immense than the moon and sun, a bright sheen to denounce all other heavenly bodies in the sky, was the Undead's light. Once more Claudia saw the light above as a revelation. This was shared and understood by all undead. And so, like her fellow compatriots, they would venture through the lands to get closer to that light. Many would wish to the depths of their soul that it was the afterlife. After all, those with a heart still left to beat proper never truly saw it completely. In that instance was there any other reason the undead should be drawn to the mysterious yet welcoming orb? It's florescence brought hope. Rumour on the wind however told stories far and wide about possible anguish and misery on the pilgrimage.

The warrior dismissed such hogwash - that was nothing more than conjecture from those who thrived in their nihilism due to Undeath. Those who lost their way or developed contemptuous hearts would do nothing more than sully those who truly sought the Light. That was what the churches and ministries told her in her home town. This was nothing more than the cycle of the gods of which Undeath was just one part of it. To give up the last journey may have meant no entry into the pearly gates of heaven.

In the back of her mind, Claudia knew there must have been some veracity in their words despite her optimism. Even having ventured as far as she did, passing winding hills, numerous small hovels, dreary villages, and passing other Undead, the feeling of emptiness besmirched her morality bit by bit. Was that Light merely fleeing every inch she trudged forward? Or was it nothing more than an illusion by those same gods to make her toil needlessly?

Her thoughts were paused upon the moment she came out of her trance, finally meeting face to face with an oppressive castle. The architecture appeared abandoned, time rotted it to such an ancient degree it was incredible it still stood on dilapidated foundations. The cobblestone was cracked and weaved together with wild ivy scouring the ruins. Birds and other animals took shelter within many crevices. Clearly no nation of any people resided in this kingdom yet it sprawled for what seemed like miles.

"Just where is this place...?" Claudia whispered to herself. Confounded by the sheer massiveness of the ruin, she fetched out her map within the confines of her leather armour, seeking to make sense of the rubble.

Unravelling the old parchment, she began to attest the geography. There were no markers and no points of interest. Her map was now almost a useless piece of paper. Shamefully it would be for her to be the single Undead to have been so disoriented they developed no sense of direction. Matching the last trails she remembered taking, Claudia discovered the glorious light she had followed might have no true set course.

"Is this the way of the Undead? To wander aimlessly amidst ancient ruin? Well, perhaps I'll find something interesting among the debris."

Rolling up the map and putting it away, Claudia began to walk through the ruins. She scanned the general area, hoping to at least find one stray Undead or some other familiar face. She had met others on her journey, many who euphoric to find the Light. Silence

instead engulfed the ruins as she ventured across a rickety bridge. Carefully placing her foot on a maintaining a balanced stance, she crossed without incident.

Once at the front gates she glanced around some more. Claudia was beginning to feel cheated by how peaceful such ruins were. Even brigands could have found solace hiding their illicit wares in such a place. As if to summon the unlikely, Claudia shouted, hoping even an adversary would at least answer.

"Hello? Am I alone in these ruins? Is there another out there like me, who sees the Light?"

The Castle was high upon a hill top, it was cold, dark and foreboding. The forests around dark and ancient. Inside the castle lay ruins, the roof had collapsed eons ago and the stone smooth to the wind. It was a tomb, no one remained here.

All but one remained here. No One Remained here.

As the wandering Undead entered the main chamber of the Castle, she would see the steps leading up to a throne, ancient wood and metal remained where all had faded. Sat on the throne was an armoured figure, plain steel, rusted and damaged but still armoured.

Lifting a rusted gauntlet, the metal squeaking loudly as it shifted, the hand raised the visor of the helmet. A damaged face stared back at the Undead female, its face was white and the left hand side skinless and leaving only bone visible.

"Whom... enters... the Tomb... of the No One." The voice groaned, as if not used for Eons. The figure stood slowly and lifted a rusted damaged longsword, half the blade missing, and a battered shield with arrows still stuck inside the wood, the sigil long faded away.

"Leave... the Tomb... of the No One. Leave... me... Be..." The voice almost begged, shifting down the steps in a long slow grinding of rusted metal and old bones.

"I know nothing, and I have nothing. I am... No One..." The voice groaned.

Upon gazing at the sunlit throne room, the hollowed window panes shedding glorious rays of light, and the discreet shadows cast, a sense of somber washed over her. How antiqued the kingdom seemed in its sorrows, the opulence somehow not disturbed by the blatant atrophy. She momentarily paused every now and then, through the visor of her helm, just basking in the dignified presence.

Reaching this palatial chair finally, she noticed the armour hanging from the steps itself. At first a bit befuddled from the armour, she began to walk to it, assuming it must have been nothing more than a lifeless body. Yet part of her felt it couldn't hurt taking a gander at the surcoat to see if any heraldry could hunch towards some ancestry of the place.

She stopped not short of seven more paces towards the being. Upon lifting the visor of his own helm, she saw the face of a bare skull. A face nothing more than what would signify had passed purely beyond the stage of putrefaction. An undead? No matter, this late stage in the "decay"?

A sinking feeling would rise out of the undead. Claudia might have been comparable to a walking corpse, but she was still just as emotional as she had been before her decent into this accursed state of man. So many questions and speculations began to fog her

mind. What of this person, had they simply been lost on their journey to the promised land? The knight at no time wanted this perception to be true.

And the confusion would only compound itself whence the skeletal knight spoke. Claudia shook her head for a moment, silently listening as 'No One' seemed rather defensive about her dwelling among their apparent kingdom.

"My apologies... No One? But are you lost? Or are you really Lord here..? Or poor soul, did you lose your mind?"

No One though made Claudia take an opposing posture upon seeing the broken longsword. She stepped back, knees steady, and slowly drew the great-sword from the strap along her back. The blade was as fine as ever, her most prized possession although some would argue more masterful crafts and enchanted weapons were worth more. She nestled it between her shoulder, standing firm and not yielding to his warning. Claudia would not be aggressive, but she most certainly would not back away. If her body were to be marred somehow by his ancient weapons than she would gladly taste the blade if only it would mean she could have been that much closer to the afterlife.

"I am not leaving. But I have no ill intent. However, if you wish to strike me first I will recompense that same aggression!"

Holding her great-sword tighter by it's handle, she shifted her shoulders and backed away a little more, apprehensive at how fast he might have been. Stubborn was the daughter of Amara, just like the rest of her people. Faithful, hardheaded, but meant well.

Once more she spoke out, trying to reconcile the other potential undead unless their mind could not be changed.

"I only wish to ask questions or perhaps look around. I am not here to defile anything. I am only here to make my pilgrimage!"

Claudia's preconceived notions of forgotten wares and treasure was no longer a goal, as she wouldn't defile the place if a being still perched inside. Instead, knowledge may have been worth a lot more than coin could have been. Meekly in her heart she felt, standing before this relic that appeared so battle torn it was hard to tell if they were simply a lost undead...or as old and hoary as the cracked cobblestone.

"Who are you?" He asked. "Why do you come here? Why do you disturb me?" He questioned

The figure ambled closer, the armour squealing with every movement. It was old, very old. No heraldry or icons were visible on the armour; all cloth rotting and all metal rusted.

"I... do not know." The voice croaked out of the helm, the gauntlet lifting the visor again as it fell with his step. The closer he got, the more that she would see of his face.

It was only half-skull. The right hand side of the figure's face was male and human, if not slowly disappearing to the bone underneath. It was clear that this person, this undead had died many years before, perhaps thousands of years. He was old, ancient.

"I... am No one... I do not... know this place, nor... do I know you." He stopped walking, turning on the spot as he looked around, his brow furrowing as he seemed to concentrate on the ruins around him.

"They... they say there is a light, I see no light. I see darkness... I see shadow, but no light." His voice was soft, a whisper, a damaged voice with no soul left behind it.

Or perhaps a little soul left.

"Who are you?" He asked. "Why do you come here? Why do you disturb me?" He questioned again, almost as if the first question had been forgotten.

"Whom... enters... the Tomb... of the No One. Leave... the Tomb... of the No One. Leave... me... Be... I know nothing, and I have nothing. I am... No One..." The voice repeated again.

This was common with the later and final stages of the undead, before the decay set in and the undead became nothing more than a soulless body, a creature of hate and malice, no better than a wild animal.

He probably had one or two deaths left before he was entirely gone. The poor Knight this man must have been, to have suffered like this?

"The Light?" He asked, as if someone had asked him an unspoken question. "I... I see no light..." He rambled on again, turning around on the spot once more. "Only shadow..."

Claudia's voice turned less stern as she put her great-sword away. It returned to her rather upbeat tone.

"My name is Claudia of Amora. I came here on the Undead's Pilgrimage, to follow the light. I got lost, veered off where my map could not make certain of a location. I did not intend to bother you, but upon my pilgrimage, I assumed I might find answers in this castle. My intrusion was not inherently intentional."

It was now apparent he may have been undead, but half his face gone; it certainly left her with bad emotions. Perhaps the truth was far more unsavoury than she had first anticipated. Patiently she waited to hear this person until after he finished talking. Hearing him repeat himself was alarming.

Reaching up to her own visor she finally pushed it up. A pale face with varicose veins sullyng the skin was revealed. Chestnut hair curled under the edges of the metal. Hazel eyes almost sunken in stared at him with a bit of compassion. The structure of her face was soft. Claudia was more like a lamb in a wolf's clothing.

"That's very unfortunate. You've been stuck down this ole ruins for gods know how long. My name is Claudia of Amora, and your forgettin' things."

She then learnt something new, looking down as he had relied the information he saw no light. How could this be? Every Undead saw the light. Perhaps her creeping suspicions were right, the Undead's pilgrimage might be some sneak magic to get them lost, to have to not deal with them.

"Really? I see the light."

She then pointed upwards, towards the daylight sky. She did not point to the sun, but rather the obvious glow which dominated her sight every time. It baffled her that this other undead could not see such things.

"The light is what I am trying to follow, to get to the afterlife. To end this life I have now, and get to heaven. I got lost, and decided to look around here. Encase you have

forgotten this as well, I'm not here to hurt ya. I just want to explore and hopefully find where the light wants me to be."

"I... I was told.. the light is that way." His hand reached out and pointed to where the light was, "I think I see it sometimes.. they tell me.. I can't remember who they are... but.. they tell me.. it's that way..." The figure stepped over to the ruined window and stared out.

He squinted through his one visible eye and looked back at her.

"I am... No One. I do not know my name, so I am No One..." He admitted. "The light..." he turned his gaze back to the window again.

"Sometimes... I think I see it.. In the distance... far away... so far away... I think... I travelled once... I don't remember..." He sighed softly and then turned back to her again.

"Who are you?" He repeated. It seemed that talking to this man would be a hassle if he was always forgetting himself, it happened to the dead when they were left like this too long.

"If you... want to search these ruins... you may... They are not mine... I think... I don't know... I don't remember..." He told her, turning to go back to the throne.

"I am tired... I should sleep, but if I sleep... I forget. They say the light... will help people remember... I can't remember who they were... but they said it..." He told her, leaning into the throne and groaning as he sat still, slumped in the armour and in the chair.

"I wish I could see the light..." He sighed softly. "See her... once more."

"I am Claudia of Amora." The undead blurted out. His forgetfulness was almost incessant but she wouldn't lose patience too easily.

After getting permission to search the ruins, Claudia didn't seem quite satisfied. Following this broken undead up until he reached his throne, she stood nearby, looking upward at him while placing her visor back down.

"Well wait then. You can't be sleeping then. You oughtta think 'bout moving around then, following the light. I can see it, so if ya want, you can accompany me."

Claudia held both of her hands at her hips and nodded as an affirmation to the sullen lad. The more he spoke, the more fragmented parts of his past seemed to unearth. Perhaps a little nudge in the right direction could help him. Not only that, Claudia got lonely. Upon presumptions, she estimated that loneliness might have caused him to get lost as well, therefore the light slowly fading from his grasp. Despite the augury that was this man as proof of the future, she was stalwart in her enthusiasm. Some would say too enthusiastic.

"Ahhh see? Ye remember a good ole lass, perhaps she found the light and you didn't. Makes more sense just ta get up n outta that chair ye have been sitting in for only the gods know how long."

With a motion as if to get him up, Claudia began walking. She opened a rickety, squeaky bay door and turned to look over his shoulder.

"If it isn't evident by now, yer insistence on sleeping might just be ya dying until ya can't deal with it no more. Soon yer going to be rabid, and I don't think she's gonna like

that."

"Claudia..." No One mumbled the word as she told him again, as if to remember it. He stared out as she spoke, his eyes trying to focus on her as she spoke to him, telling him he couldn't sleep or that he had remembered something.

"I... remember her?" He asked, "Who is she?" He asked but then shook his head. Motioning him to get up, she would have to gently pull him up from his seat.

Walking beside her and a step behind, No One walked slowly and trudged along, his armour screeching and groaning with the rusted joints.

"Rabid? There are those like that here. Be careful. They do not come for me anymore... I don't know why." He walked along and followed her through the door.

The inside of the castle was like the room that she had found 'No One' in, it was ruined and damaged and any identification of who's place this was and why it was built here was long gone.

"This place is old... I remember this place... I think." He told her from behind, his hand raising his visor again to look at her.

"You are... Clau..Claudia?" He asked, trying to remember and make it stick in his head. "I am..." he paused, trying to remember his name. "I don't know. You can call me... No One... They do.. Whoever... they..are..."

After helping him to his possibly unstable feet, Claudia seemed overly eager to explore and follow the said light. The ruins were history that seemed long forgotten, even older than those history tomes she had pilfered some times ago.

"Ya tell me lad, yer the one who brought 'er up. Obviously ye remembered something in that boggy mind of yers."

Upon hearing him forewarn her of the potential depraved undead lingering about, suddenly her steps grew quieter and more purposeful. Looking back around at her new found acquaintance, she saw the broken longsword. Pulling out a dagger from her waist, she handed it to him, handle first.

"Well if we are gonna be wandering around with delirious folk ya might as well take this dagger for yer protection. I'd reckon that longsword of yers has long since outlived it's use."

The rest of the castle so far had been just like the rest. Worn out and completely derelict from age..aside from the supposed crazed undead roaming about. She stopped, trying to move debris aside to see if there were any books, scrolls, or some other kind of ornate item.

"Well lad, if ya remember anything, do tell me. I'd like ta know why such a sprawling kingdom fell ta this degree."

Looking over his way, after him repeating her name, Claudia figured she'd assert herself in more depth.

"Aye, I am Claudia of Amora. Ya know, the land up north, along the coast? Ain't nothing but wharf folk we are. I grew up as an orphan, but my heart didn't turn bitter. I was happy with what I had, ya see? Grew up on a naval mercenary outfit, and me sword has been with me ever since."

Pondering for a moment announcing his de-facto name, she brought a hand where her chin would be and decided No One wasn't too acceptable for her. The man still talked...even though he was on the brink of no return, she still felt he deserved some kind of title.

"Well, I don't like no one. It doesn't suit ya. How's about Lark? After all, you 'n me are on this here little escapade. Ye ain't No One no more, but someone on a conquest."

"Lark... that sounds... nice." No One nodded, no, not No One... Lark. He was now Lark.

Walking along with Claudia, Lark stumbled slowly, he did not accept the weapon that she had tried to give him, simply looking at it and then at his own blade. "This one will do, I have had this sword for a long time."

Descending into the dark pits of the castle, Lark's armour groaned and creaked, it was obvious he had not moved in a very long time. He mumbled occasionally under his breath, she would hear her name, his name and even some of the things she told him repeated over and over; he was trying to remember her.

The castle was old and dark, it had long been abandoned by any living person and the sounds of feral undead occasionally reverberated through the dank halls.

"I would... not go to the .. lower fifth.." He suddenly spoke as they passed through a half smashed door.

"There is a creature there, it... it came sometime... I don't remember when. It cannot leave the Lower Fifth, too big.." He explained.

The King, Lark as was known to his new friends... friends, he liked that word. He had friends...

The King woke and sat up in his grave. Luther Odonaghue the 15th. That was his name but he did not like it, he did not want it. He was Lark, the friend and companion to Claudia. He was going to show his Death that he had changed, that he was not Luther Odonaghue the 15th anymore.

Pulling himself out of the grave, Lark brushed off the dirt from his armour and looked around. He did not know where he was and could not see the light. He was worried that the light would be forever missing from him, but Claudia had showed him where it was, she had showed him that he could find it.

Taking a breath, Lark set off in the direction he guessed it was.

He walked, he walked and he walked. Lark, former King Luther Odonaghue the 15th walked.

He soon found places he recognised, memories of long past events. Castles and forts, cities and forests. Marshes and jungles. He walked and he walked. He did not know how far he had to walk but he walked.

With his old and rusted armour clanking with every step, with his broken sword in his scabbard, Lark walked.

He did not know how many days it took, how many weeks, months or years but he arrived.

He had passed the Castle that Claudia found him in, he had passed through the cities they had visited. He recognised none of the people but his memory was still patchy.

Lark made it to the light. He had asked for guidance from other Undead and had travelled with some for short time. He had even saved several from fates similar to his own. It felt good to help others.

Claudia had been right.

"You have returned again." Death spoke as he made his way to the gate.

"I have." Lark replied.

"You have not learnt your lesson, you shall never enter these gates."

"I will." Lark told Death.

"Such ego, certainty. If you can win then you can pass." Death told Lark and attacked.

Once more, Lark lost.

Death sent his body and soul far away, even further than before.

Lark woke once more, he had no idea how long he had been gone or how far he was this time but he woke and he walked.

Determination took him, he knew that if he died then he would take even longer but Lark did not shirk a duty given to him by Claudia.

He helped people.

Days turned to weeks and weeks to months as he walked. Lark once again remembered places, he had been here several times and had given up a lot of the time. No more.

He walked.

Castles, Cities, Jungles and Marshes.

The Gate, Death, a duel of fates.

A lost battle.

Cast out once more, again and again, Lark strove for the Gates of Light. He did not know when but he had seen it again, he saw it again and again. The light grew brighter and brighter Soon it was burning in the sky.

Tales and legends of the Knight Lark blazing through the world, running and walking on to the Light, forever cast away at its mouth. He gathered companions, he gathered followers, he gathered friends.

He gathered Family.

When he was cast away again they found him. His friends, his family and his followers found his body and kept him safe. Months, Years and Centuries passed as Lark, the Knight of the Light pushed for the Gate.

Many of the followers did not pass through the gate, they travelled with him, stayed with him and returned with him. When cast out, they would turn to find him instead of making their way into the afterlife.

Death grew annoyed, the fact that Luther Odonaghue the 15th was gathering this following, Death made sure people knew who he was, knew who this Lark really was. Most were shocked, few were turned away.

They saw his determination, they heard his story, Lark even told them his tale.

Lark's sword had finally returned to full strength, its once broken visage now a full steel sword.

His armour was cleaned, he almost looked like a King. The only thing that was different was his face. He never regained his old appearance, still bone and flesh, the flesh was white as paper.

He maybe only had a few lives left to use.