

Easy Side Quest

Iris woke up before dawn, determined to be fully prepared for the day ahead. She quickly got dressed in a comfortable tunic and trousers, paired with her trusty calf-high leather boots. She didn't want to wear any armor just yet since Sera was still asleep and she didn't want to wake her up. Iris wanted to take a moment to herself before the busy day began.

Still, she strapped her sword to her waist and looked around to make sure she wasn't forgetting anything.

"You're going out?" a groggy voice asked from across the room.

"Yes, just getting tea. It's still early, you have plenty of time to sleep," Iris whispered to the tired elf. "I'll have a pot ready for you when you get up."

Sera didn't reply before the sound of her breathing was the only thing filling the void.

With a shrug, Iris grabbed her satchel and quietly made her way out of the room and downstairs.

As she descended the stairs, she could smell the aroma of fresh tea and baked goods wafting through the air, causing her stomach to growl in anticipation. The innkeeper was the only one in the room, and she quickly offered to get some tea for her. Thanking the woman, Iris headed over to a small table by the window, unstrapped her sword, and leaned it against the wall. As she sat down, she reached into her satchel and pulled out a book to read while she waited for her tea. Helda, the innkeeper from Cosdale, had thought she would be interested in trashy medieval romance novels with very little depth.

The woman had known Iris well.

The telv innkeeper soon arrived with a pot of tea and a small variety of pastries. Iris continued her book as she sipped the tea, closing her eyes and savoring the taste. It was much better than the root tea she'd been taking daily.

That thought brought a smile to her face. *I may not need that anymore with Kaira. No chance of pregnancy there!*

She chuckled at an errant image that popped into her head.

Unless there's a surprise waiting for me.

The thought made her nearly snort her tea out of her nose.

Iris's attention was drawn back to her book as the faint hues of the dawn began to color the sky. She savored the last sips of her tea and nibbled on the pastries, enjoying the quiet stillness of the morning. The peaceful atmosphere was only interrupted by the occasional chirping of birds outside.

As the first patrons began to appear, the quiet ambiance that Iris had been enjoying was soon replaced by the clinking of dishes and murmurs of conversation. She let out a sigh as she poured herself another cup of tea, beckoning the innkeeper for another pot as she walked by. A fresh pot arrived just in time for Sera, who entered the common room looking more refreshed than earlier, to pour herself a cup of tea and greet Iris.

“Good morning,” Sera said, settling into a chair across from Iris.

“Good morning,” Iris replied, setting aside her book. “Did you sleep well?”

“I did, thank you. And you?” Sera asked, taking a sip of her tea.

“I slept fine,” Iris said with a small smile. “I’m just a little nervous about tomorrow.”

“The ball,” Sera said, nodding in understanding. “Don’t worry, we’ll be fine. We’ll just bide our time until we meet with Lady Arden.”

“Yeah, you’re right. I’ll try to be careful, luckily I’ll have Kaira there,” Iris said.

As she scanned the room, Iris noticed Tanith’s absence and asked Sera about it. Sera explained that he had gone to meet with a representative from the Merchant’s Guild and bring them to the inn.

Iris returned to her romance novel, savoring the plot twists and turns, as she and Sera calmly sipped their tea. Their peaceful moment was interrupted when Kaira strode into the room, dressed in her armor and exuding confidence. Iris’s heart skipped a beat as she took in the sight of the Guardswoman.

The woman smiled and waved as she caught sight of Iris, hurrying over to the two women.

“Good morning!” Kaira greeted them cheerfully, walking over to their table.

Iris smiled and greeted her... she didn’t know. They’d only had one sort-of-date.

Sera raised her cup in greeting.

Iris scooted over to make room for Kaira to sit next to her. “Hey, you. You’re happy this morning,” she said with a smile.

“Thank you! I have a long day today, but I have one of my lieutenants covering for me tomorrow afternoon so that I can prepare for the ball,” Kaira explained, her excitement palpable.

“Did you manage to get with Marlina?” Iris asked.

“I did, and she’s going to prepare everything I need! I can’t wait for you to see it,” Kaira said with a mysterious smile.

Hiiiiighly suspect.

Iris narrowed her eyes at Kaira's cryptic response, but before she could ask any more questions, Tanith entered the room with an elegantly dressed woman who looked like she belonged in high society.

She heard Sera gasp across from her and quickly move her teacup away.

Tanith made his way to the table where the group sat, and the high elf woman followed behind him. He introduced her as Guildmistress Valentina, the head of the Merchant's Guild.

“Good morning, I trust I am not intruding?” the Guildmistress asked.

Sera quickly stood up and brushed off her dress. “No, ma’am. I did not expect you to attend yourself, Guildmistress. I would have made time for us to come to you.”

The woman gave her a soft smile. “I am not beneath venturing out into the city in search of a good deal, Miss Timrel. Now, shall we?” she said, pulling out a seat next to Sera—who had quickly moved down one.

As the Guildmistress settled into her seat, Tanith pulled out a chair for himself and sat down beside Kaira, the two giving each other a nod as he did. Iris observed the exchange between Sera and the older woman, noting the air of formality between the two. Sera seemed to be holding her breath, looking nervous and fidgety.

Iris decided to break the tension by speaking up. “Good morning, Guildmistress Valentina. It’s an honor to meet you,” she said, offering a small smile.

The woman turned toward Iris and returned a smile. “And you as well, Miss Iris. I have heard so much about you,” she said before pulling out a small notebook from... somewhere. “Now, for the purpose of this meeting, I assume that Miss Iris Stuart is the one in charge?” she said while looking around those at the table.

Iris nodded her head. “I’m the one who wants to start the guild, yes. I am also an adventurer.

Guildmistress Valentina nodded, jotting down some notes in her notebook. “Excellent. Now, Miss Stuart, may I ask what your vision for this guild is?”

Iris straightened in her seat, taking a deep breath before speaking. “I envision a guild where adventurers can come together and support one another, share resources and information, and take on missions and quests that are both challenging and rewarding. Quests that can help the various communities and people of the region more quickly and efficiently than other agencies.”

The Guildmistress nodded, her quill scratching away in her notebook.

“Very well said, Miss Stuart. It seems like you have put much thought into this. Now, let me explain what is required to start a guild. I am adapting this based on the goals you have stated, as it is slightly different for each type of guild. Yours is most similar to the Guards Guild or Blades Guild,” Valentina said, putting her notebook aside and leaning forward.

“First, you need to have at least five members. These members must all be adventurers who have completed something in your... adventuring, which a quest or something you mentioned would suffice. They must also all be in good standing with the law and have no criminal record,” she said, ticking off each requirement on her fingers.

Iris listened intently, committing each requirement to memory. She saw Sera writing notes next to the Guildmistress.

“What happens next can come in any order, however, you need all of them for the guild to be started. I will leave it up to you, how you proceed,” she explained.

“You will need a sponsorship city. I am assuming you wish to start the guild here?”

“We do,” Iris confirmed.

“Very well. Then you will need to obtain approval from the city leadership. While hosting the headquarters of a guild is a great boon to any city, ensuring they sponsor a guild that fits the values and goals of a city is important. The Shipwright’s Guild would be a poor choice for Brightburn, for example. I will not presume to know what it would take to garner the city’s support for this. At the very least, you will need to be a citizen of this nation, which as a terran, I presume you are not,” she said with a small wave of her hand.

The woman was correct. *I need to figure that out.*

“Next, you need to submit an application to the Guild Council, along with a registration fee. The Guild Registry is responsible for keeping records of all registered guilds and their staff,” Valentina continued.

Iris nodded, mentally noting the registration fee.

“Once your application is accepted, you will need to select a guildmaster—presumably yourself amongst the five founding members of the profession. Then you will need to have at least six support personnel, in addition to a contracted esquire. The guildmaster is responsible for leading the guild and making decisions on behalf of the members,” Valentina said.

Iris took a deep breath, feeling a sense of responsibility settle on her shoulders. She had always been a natural leader, but leading a guild was a different level of responsibility.

“And finally, you will need to establish a guild hall. For your guild,” she said, glancing down at her notebook. “This is a place where members can gather, and you will accept your quests or what have you. It can be anything from a small office to a large estate, depending on your resources. Nevertheless, you are required to show you have at least one thousand gold to initially invest into your guild,” Valentina concluded.

Iris sucked in a breath, glad that Sera was noting down all of the information. Starting a guild was going to be a lot of work.

And expensive.

“Thank you for explaining the process, Guildmistress. It sounds like a lot of work, but I am excited to get started,” Iris said, her determination evident in her voice.

Valentina smiled, impressed by Iris’s enthusiasm. “I am glad to hear it, Miss Stuart. The Merchant’s Guild supports the establishment of new guilds, and we will do what we can to assist you. I look forward to your proposal to the Guild Council and how your guild stands to profit. Remember, you will require the majority to approve the creation of the guild. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact my office,” she said, rising from her chair.

Iris stood up as well, feeling a surge of gratitude towards the Guildmistress. “Thank you, Guildmistress Valentina. I will definitely keep that in mind,” she said, shaking the woman’s hand.

As Valentina and Tanith made their way out of the common room, Sera turned to Iris with a look of excitement. “This could really be happening. I must speak to my company. I’m sure they will give their support!” she exclaimed.

Kaira shook her head. “I can’t believe it... I never thought I’d witness a new guild being created. I would love to do what I can to help you.

Iris grinned, feeling a sense of pride in her chest. “And we’re going to make it happen,” she said, determined.

When Tanith returned after escorting the Guildmistress to her carriage, the group started brainstorming what positions they would need to fill. Six people didn’t sound like a lot, but they only potentially had two, if Sera and Tanith signed on. Which if Iris had to guess, was almost a sure deal. The tantalizing prospect of establishing the first new guild in an age was overwhelming the merchant woman. The guard himself seemed interested and Iris could easily see the man filling the role of an evaluator or someone who assessed new adventurers and assigned a rank.

Kaira eagerly contributed ideas and expressed her willingness to assist with the crucial task of finding the required five adventurers, ensuring that they were free of any legal troubles. Iris was grateful for the offer and eagerly accepted.

Soon enough, as the Guard Captain had to depart, she gave Iris a reassuring squeeze on the shoulder before bidding farewell.

“See you tomorrow morning?” Kaira asked in a hushed tone.

Iris beamed. “Absolutely. Have a good day at work!” She gave Kaira's hand a gentle squeeze before the woman pulled away.

After watching her cute butt walk out of the room, she turned back to Sera.

The other woman gave Iris a knowing smile, and Iris responded by playfully scrunching her face and sticking out her tongue.

Sera chuckled. "Alright, let's get to work. We won't rest until we have a solid plan for tomorrow," the elf declared.

Iris straightened. She was ready.



Iris leaned against Mocha in the horse's stall, enjoying the early morning quiet. The sounds of horses moving and making noises filled the stables, but she found solace in her horse's company. It was early, the sun was just rising, and she had already spent several of the hourly town bells talking with Mocha.

The two had the discussed plans for the Adventurer's Guild, and Mocha had even given her an idea: the guild would need stables, which meant a stablehand. This brought up a strange conversation about what kind of person Mocha wanted, but Iris didn't judge. It needed to be a cute telv who was good at scratches, brushing, and liked apples.

Yeah, it was weird.

Suddenly, Mocha let out a whinny, her tail twitching, snapping Iris out of her thoughts. "*Hey, focus.*"

"Sorry, so. Mocha, what am I doing?" she asked, returning to the main reason she was out here. "I've never been this nervous around someone. It's like I'm back in high school when I'm around Kaira."

Mocha turned her ears back and relaxed them, huffing a response.

"I know we've only been on one date," Iris continued, "but did she see it as a date? She was super flirty the entire time, but is that just how she is?"

"*She did kiss you,*" Mocha whinnied.

"And there's that! What was that? It was just a peck on the cheek, but holy crap, it made me want to drag her straight to my room!" Iris exclaimed.

Mocha rolled her eyes. "*Okay, let's tone down the sluttiness. It was just a peck.*"

Iris threw up her hands. "Don't I know it! It's just... she makes me... I dunno Mocha. There's something about her."

"*Yeah, she's flirting with you and you like the attention.*" Mocha snorted.

"Ugh. I don't know what to do, Mocha. She's coming for breakfast soon, that's twice she's come for breakfast before work. What does that mean?" Iris asked.

"*That she likes to eat?*" The horse suggested.

"Look, don't be sassy with me. There's something there, right?" Iris prodded.

Mocha wasn't sure. "*Is there?*"

“I don't know! Ugh. I wish I could read minds. This would be so much easier,” Iris said, pausing as a thought struck her. “Wait, Mocha, do you think there are mind mages? Shit, do we need to do something to protect our minds?”

Mocha turned her head and gave her a look. “*You’re so dumb,*” She neighed.

“I know...” Iris sighed, falling back on Mocha, making the horse grunt. “I guess I’ll find out tonight. Hopefully.”

Mocha neighed, “*Good, now get off me.*”

“Fiiiine,” Iris said, standing up and brushing off all of the straw that stuck to her. “Thanks for the chat, Mocha. Love ya.”

The horse stood up and gave her a look before nudging her chest. “*Love you too. Now get outta here. It’s too early for this shit,*” Mocha snorted.

Iris smiled, feeling better, and made her way out of the stables.



As the morning sun streamed through the windows of the inn's common area, the smell of fresh bread and sizzling bacon filled the air. The room was already bustling with activity as travelers and locals alike sat down to enjoy their breakfast. Iris sat at a small table in the corner, tapping her foot nervously as she scanned the room for any sign of Kaira. She had arrived early, hoping to calm her nerves before Kaira arrived. Despite her efforts, her heart was still racing with anticipation.

Finally, she spotted a familiar figure making her way toward her table. It was Kaira, wearing her usual armor of the city guard but with her helmet tucked under her arm. Iris couldn't help but feel a flutter in her chest as Kaira approached her. She stood up, smiling warmly at the elf.

The two greeted each other with a hug and the women sat down together. Iris smiled and waved at the barmaid that was working, quickly requesting some tea and the breakfast she smelled cooking.

She focused on the cute elf across from her. “So, busy day today,” she said nonchalantly.

Kaira chuckled. “Just a bit. I have to perform a garrison inspection, but I will be done by the midday bell. Then I have a couple of surprises lined up.”

Iris raised a brow. “Oh? What do you have?”

“So, a friend recommended a stylist who would *love* to work on your hair today for the ball. Then we have to get your dress, which I am thrilled about, by the way.”

“What about you? What are you wearing?” Iris asked, still curious about what the woman was hiding.

Kaira smirked. "Oh, it's a surprise. I think you'll like it."

Iris rolled her eyes. "You've got me figured out, yeah?"

"I think I do. And speaking of surprises, I think I have something that will fit the occasion perfectly." Kaira reached into her satchel and pulled out a small, velvet box. "It's not much, but I wanted to give you something for the ball."

Iris's eyes widened as she took the box from Kaira's hand. She opened it to reveal a pair of midnight blue earrings that matched the requested color of her dress. The silver settings were adorned with tiny star-shaped diamonds that caught the light and sparkled like the night sky.

"Oh my gods, Kaira. They're beautiful," Iris gasped, holding them up to admire them closer.

"I'm glad you like them," Kaira said, smiling softly. "I thought they would look stunning with your dress."

Iris nodded, feeling tears prick at the corners of her eyes. "Thank you so much. I can't wait to wear them tonight," she said before carefully returning them to the box.

Kaira leaned across the table and took Iris's hand. "I know... I know we may be moving fast, but I feel a connection with you. There's something about this, and I think you feel it too. I want to see where it leads."

Iris squeezed Kaira's hand, feeling a warmth spread through her chest. "Thank you, Kaira. I don't know what to say."

The elf smiled. "Let's just enjoy each other's company, and maybe... we'll see what tonight brings."

Iris nodded, a smile tugging at the corners of her lips. They fell into a comfortable silence as they ate their breakfast, the anticipation of the ball and the night ahead hanging in the air.

An older woman entered the common area and approached the bar. Despite her disheveled appearance, the woman carried herself with a certain elegance that caught Iris's attention. The telv ordered a drink with a calm voice and the bartender quickly poured her a shot, sliding the glass to her along the counter. The woman caught it and downed the brown liquor in a single motion, her movements smooth and practiced. Iris couldn't help but stare as her curiosity won over.

"What are you looking at?" Kaira asked in between bites of her eggs.

Iris gestured toward the woman with her head. "That woman over there."

Kaira turned, a bit too obvious, and the woman saw them staring. Her eyes widened with recognition and she immediately stood and walked toward them.

Iris cursed.

Kaira wiped off her mouth and stood up, a polite smile on her face. "Can we help you with something, ma'am?"

Oh, nice customer voice.

The woman gave a small nod. "I couldn't help but notice you, guardswoman. I have been trying to get help with my problem for days and none of the garrisons will take me seriously."

"I'm Captain Harken. What issues are you having?" Kaira asked with authority.

"There's a monster in my basement, and the guard won't help!" the woman said, with clenched fists "It's a rat, but it's the size of a dog! It's been gnawing on my food stores and I can hear it scurrying around all night. I can't sleep, I can't eat. I'm at my wit's end."

Iris could hear snickers from a nearby table and she gave the men there a silencing scowl.

The woman continued explaining her situation, describing when the monster rat had taken up residence in her basement and how it had been terrorizing her for days.

Kaira listened intently, her expression turning serious. "Are you sure it's a rat?"

The woman threw her hands up. "I knew it! The guard doesn't care!"

Iris stood up from the table and spoke up, "I can take care of it for you. It shouldn't be a problem."

The woman turned to Iris, looking her up and down. "And who are you?"

I wish I was in my armor. Probably would have been taken more seriously.

"I'm Iris. I'm an adventurer, and I can handle it," she said confidently.

The woman's focus darted between Kaira and Iris for a moment but then nodded. "Alright. Since the guard doesn't care, if you can take care of it, I'll pay you well."

Iris grinned. "Consider it done," she said. "I don't mind getting my hands dirty."

Kaira raised an eyebrow. "Are you sure?"

Iris nodded. "Yeah, it's just an easy side quest. And you have that inspection to do, remember? I'll meet up with you later."

Kaira gave her a bemused smirk. "A side quest? I guess I owe you one."

Iris dismissed the woman's gratitude with a casual wave of her hand. "I'll only accept payment in the form of a date," she said with a sly grin, her eyes meeting Kaira's.

The elf was taken aback, her eyes widening in surprise. "That was certainly... forward of you. But I accept," she replied, a hint of amusement in her voice.

The older woman scowled at the exchange. "If you two would kindly schedule your courtship for another time," she snapped, her impatience palpable.

Iris winced at the woman's tone and turned to her. "I need to retrieve my gear. I'll be outside in ten minutes," she announced, her tone firm.

The woman gave a curt nod and marched away. Iris then turned to Kaira with a bright smile. "I'll be quick and see you back here! I can't wait for tonight!" she said eagerly.

Kaira chuckled softly. "I feel the same way," she replied, her eyes shining with anticipation.



Fully armored and equipped, Iris made her way to the front of the inn, with Mocha by her side. The woman eyed Mocha with suspicion. "Why did you bring a horse?" she demanded.

Iris patiently explained, "I wasn't sure how far your home would be, and I need to return quickly after we're done."

The woman huffed. "Fine. Your horse better not make a mess in my garden."

Mocha snorted indignantly, "*You'll be lucky if that's all I do, you dusty old—*"

"Mocha! Don't be rude." Iris interrupted, scolding her horse.

Mocha looked away, her ears flicking grumpily.

The woman scowled, and Iris sighed.

"Please, lead the way," Iris asked politely.

The woman turned and stomped off, and Iris followed with a roll of her eyes. She couldn't help but think that for someone in need of help, the woman was being quite difficult. *Although, if I hadn't slept in days and the Guard had ignored my pleas...*

Nope, still a jerk.

Iris exchanged a knowing look with Mocha, who seemed to share her thoughts. Although, she suspected the horse would use more choice language.

Iris followed the woman through the winding streets of Brightburn, the early morning sun casting long shadows across their path. The city was slowly coming to life, with merchants and vendors setting up their stalls and carts along the sidewalks. The air was filled with the smells of the city, mingling with the faint scent of damp earth from the nearby river.

As they arrived at the woman's home, Iris took a moment to survey the decently built, two-story house that sat on the incline of a hill in the city. The house seemed to have weathered the years well, with a warm shade of terra cotta painted stone, and white accents along the windows and eaves.

How the hell did a dog-sized rat get in here?

The woman glanced at Mocha and scowled. “Remember, your horse should behave.”

Iris looked over the supposed garden in front of the house, a single patch of bushes that looked unkempt and on the verge of dying.

This woman...

“Wish me luck, Mocha.”

Her horse neighed.

“For dealing with the rat, not the woman...” Iris mumbled under her breath.

Iris followed the woman through the main floor of the house and to the top of a narrow staircase that led to the basement. As they descended, the air grew cooler and damper. They finally reached a small landing at the bottom of the stairs, and the woman pointed to a door at the end of a hallway.

“The monster is through there,” the woman said with a shudder.

Iris approached the door and inspected it, seeing an occupied keyhole. “Locked, huh?” she said, testing the knob.

“Yes, I locked it tight. I didn't want it to come up and attack me,” the woman said.

Iris nodded and drew her sword. “Alright, stand back,” she said, and the woman quickly scurried up the stairs. Iris took a deep breath and swung the door open.

The room beyond was dark and musty, and Iris could hear the scurrying of something moving. She stepped inside and held her sword aloft, ready to strike at any moment. She heard the woman's voice from the top of the stairs.

“Be careful!”

Iris crept through the dimly lit basement, her senses on high alert as she scanned the murky corners of the room for any sign of the monster. Her heart thudded in her chest, her grip tightening on her sword's hilt as she approached what appeared to be the source of a faint scratching sound.

Suddenly, there was movement to her left, and without hesitation, she **Focused** and channeled her **Mana Sight**.

Before her stood a rat the size of a wolf, its matted fur bristling with a shimmering of deep red mana. Its eyes glowed red as it stared her down, filled with an aching hunger.

She cast her **Storm Armor**, the lightning cracking against the basement's stone floor. Iris lifted her hand and cast a **Spark**, letting it hover above her hand. Her eyes narrowed, but then she heard a low growl coming from behind her. She turned to see another pair of red eyes staring at her from the darkness, followed by a third.

Then all as one, they let out a blood-curdling screech.