INTERLUDE 23 This takes place just after the events in chapter 23

Kat’s sword slid slowly out from the devil’s heart. A look of satisfaction crossed her face as she watched as it quickly bled out from the pierced heart. Turning back to the others, she flipped back her hair. “Well that was fun. What’s next?”

The others were not listening to her; they were regarding the corpse. The battle had been difficult. It had taken the combined might of the Stalkers, working as a team, to defeat the baatezu. As they watched, the body and all its possessions dematerialized.

“What is happening?” questioned Shribryn. She could not see, but could sense the after effect.

“It is returning to its own plane” answered Pelias. “It must have been a summoned creature.”

“Something that powerful, retorted Ska’arr? More likely a calling and a bargain struck.”

“Yes, but by who or what and for what purpose? “Raven spoke up. “And how does this relate to the kidnapping of Belros Songsteel and that girl that Ro-Lund-Do seemed so desperate to save?” The druid spun to regard Scuro, suspicion most evident in her glare. Then all eyes turned to the necromancer.

All this while, Scuro seethed and boiled. *So close. So close.* The devil had whispered to him that more information regarding Ariana was forthcoming. But not now! Not when the group had destroyed the devil- it had been so close to escaping! His hands clenched and unclenched. Little Drac, sensing its master’s rage took to bat-dancing on his silver hair. The fireball spell kept racing through his mind as he wanted to unleash it on them. Only Ro-Lund-Do kept him from completing the incantation.

*No, no! Stop! Think! We still need their abilities. We still need to rescue Arianna. Do not throw it all away now.* Slowly, the death cleric’s thoughts eased the murderous impulses. As he noted them looking at him, he looked back with silvered eyes and put up his arms as if beseeching the gods.

“I do not know. I do not know the answers to those questions. But I think we will find the answers if we continue. Find the girl, find the answers.” The Stalkers regarded him a moment longer.

“Well standing here makes no sense”, Ska’aar broke the silence. “He is correct. Let’s continue on and get some answers.” With those words, the group prepared to move on.

*Would you truly have hurt them?* Ro-Lund-Do’s thought interrupted Scuro’s mind. *They help us. They are our friends.*

***True. For a moment there I reacted as the Imax of Necromancy would have, when denied what he desired. A lapse in judgement, not to be repeated, but friends...no, mere underlings, minions.***

There was a brief silence. Then…*Why are we here?*

***What? To rescue her, of course.***

*And then? After?*

***After? You know the plan. We cast the Soul spell. We stop Karsus. We save Netheril. We rule the Senate and the world.***

*By saving the Empire, we change the timeline. By changing the timeline, we alter the future. The people and places we know now may not come into being; never exist. Dupari may never exist. Our family may never exist. And that is only if the Soul spell works as intended. If it does not, as before, then all may change. We may not exist.*

***What is bringing this on?***

*We have a chance to regain Arianna. With her with us, we have an opportunity to make amends. We only gave her up for the sake of empire. We know how deeply that hurt; both her and us. But the empire is gone now. Let it die. Let us start anew. A new beginning. We asked Blackhammer for the orc fortress, as a base of operations, so we could help safeguard the caravans, defend Triboar. It is a start. I want the here and now; I want to see my father, my brother, my sister*

***Weakling fool- I am in charge and…***

*So, who said you are in control…*

As the Stalkers moved out, they were unaware of the conflict between the souls of Ro-Lund-Do and Scuro.