

## Chapter 134: Forlorn Farewell

Lysette stood on the dorm rooftops, Mirae standing behind her with their arms wrapped around her waist. Lysette closed her eyes and leaned her head back, falling more and more into her love's embrace. A part of Lysette wanted to give herself completely to Mirae's affections, if only for a bit. But the prospect of further scrying kept her from assenting to more than kisses and caresses for the time being.

"There's something I'm curious about, Lyse," Mirae said.

Lysette raised an eyebrow as she turned around and embraced them back.

"Why didn't you ask about the spying?"

"Well, two reasons. First, and most obviously, he could have simply lied. Perhaps I would have caught a momentary crack in his expression, or some other tell that he was untruthful, and perhaps not. But more importantly, even if he knows that we know he's been spying on us—something I consider unlikely. I would rather not make that, and every subsequent iteration down the rabbit hole, common knowledge to us. Which is important, because of the significance of my last question."

"I was a bit confused about that too."

"It was subtle. Saffron told me the same story he did, with one crucial difference. Rather than it being the royal family who maintains Domar's kingdom in his stead, she said it was a lineage of Godslayers who did so. Considering the source, I believe her over him."

"So, you made him worry that there were other Godslayers out there?"

"There were a lot of potential things he could have taken away from this, but they all boil down to the fact that he was scrying on me when I left the capital, and there's a good chance his tip was why I was summoned there in the first place."

“So you let him know that you were in cahoots with another Godslayer?”

“To be honest, I’m not sure what his takeaway was. Maybe he thought I was Domar’s Godslayer, correcting some corrupting influences. Maybe he realized that his position as Chancellor was more precarious than he thought as a result. Maybe he finally saw that I have a point, reasons behind my apparent madness. But what he took away specifically is less important than that he took something away from it.”

“Why so?”

“Because battles are as much about the mind as the body. If I manage to sow one seed of doubt in his mind or heart, that could be the difference between victory and death.”

“Who are you and what have you done with my Lyse?”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

Serrena’s voice echoed from behind them. “It means: Where in the Infernal realm did you learn that sort of strategy?”

“From how plants defend themselves from predators, of course.”

“Yeah, you’re going to need a better explanation than that, Lyse.” Serrena walked over with crossed arms and her signature scowl. “Or at least a more complete one.”

“I didn’t lie. Plenty of plants have defense mechanisms in place to protect themselves from predators. Sometimes they’re obvious. Thorns, nettles, and the like. Sometimes they’re less obvious, but still immediate, like chemicals that make them taste bad, or compounds which irritate skin, flesh, and membrane. As it turns out, a lot of those same compounds, when diluted and refined, become potent remedies for various illnesses.”

“And sometimes they’re not obvious at all. Mimicry, for instance. Benign plants look like poisonous ones, to mislead predators into avoiding them. Or luring other animals to protect them with fruits and nectars.”

“I don’t quite follow that last one.”

“Hiring a bodyguard, in simple terms. Produce succulent fruits that attract bears, and the bears will keep deer from eating your stems and leaves. As a bonus, the bears help spread your seeds.

“The point is that there are plenty of ways for a weaker individual to defend themselves against a stronger one.”

“First of all,” Serrena said, “I’m not sure how you are connecting those observations from your past life to, admittedly, a rather intelligent gambit involving information warfare. But also, I have to ask: Are you weaker?”

“I don’t know what to say about that first point. It just... made sense, I guess? I’ve had a lot of time to think about things over the past few weeks. As for the answer to your second question. If the two of us fought at night during the new moon when my power is at its peak, I’d win. Any other time, and it’d be a hard-fought battle where either of us could come out on top. But—”

“During the blood moon, you’ll be at a disadvantage?” Serrena asked.

“Yes. And you all will need to remain on campus to protect against whatever other chicanery likely to await us. Plus, we agreed I would come alone. Fail to do that and we could have other problems.”

“Like?” Mirae asked.

“I don’t know. But I expect him to have some way of forcing the issue.”

Serrena sighed. “Yet one more thing we’ll have to investigate. Mirae, are you just about ready to leave?”

“Almost. But you’re going to want to look away for a few minutes.”

Serrena scowled, but then it melted into a gentle smile. “Thanks for the warning. Just try not to be too loud or take too long, okay?”

Mirae grinned as they turned to Lysette with an almost predatory look on their face. Lysette paused for a moment as her love approached, and shivered with absolute delight. She stood on her tiptoes, then leaned her head and closed her eyes. And she gave up control as Mirae took their time rubbing their hands against her sides and around her waist.

Mirae’s tongue was just a bit longer than before, Lysette realized as it slithered down her throat. She suppressed a moan for Serrena’s sake as she otherwise let the feelings of passion permeate through her entire body. The intense heat was met with a bitter cold that only served to further ignite the passions building in their mutual liplock.

Lysette summoned shadows with what reason she could scrounge up, wrapping them around the two as they released unrecognized tension which had built over the previous evening. And they continued to kiss with fervor far past mere satiation. They both knew that it would be a few days before they’d see each other again. And there was always that chance, one she dared not dwell upon, that something would happen to one or both of them before they could reunite.

After what felt like two minutes but could have easily been five, Lysette and Mirae broke their kiss, pulling back slightly to stare into one another’s eyes. Despite their other bodily changes, Mirae’s dark brown eyes were just as soft yet piercing as they were on the day the two first met. And Lysette wanted to get lost in them yet again, to be taken once more, to cede control fully without regard to consequence. And maybe, just maybe, once everything was

settled down, she'd be able to spend some even better time with Mirae. The thought alone delighted her.

“Ahem.” Serrena’s voice pierced through the darkness barrier. “I think you two have had enough *private time* together. Now then, Mirae and I have a long flight and I think it’d be best if we leave before things get too rowdy. Sunrise isn’t that far away.”

Lysette dispelled her shadows, turned around, and leaned back into Mirae’s embrace. The stars were fading one by one as the onset of the blue hour foretold the arrival of a new dawn soon to follow.

After a moment of standing in silence, leaning on Mirae both literally and metaphorically, Lysette turned to Serrena.

“Look after them for me in my stead, Serrena,” she said.

“And you’re not going to ask them to do the same for me?”

“Of course not, Serrena. Objectively, the two of you are far beyond most mortals in terms of physical capability, and I trust both of you to handle whatever comes up. But subjectively, Mirae is still my partner, and I still worry about them.”

“And?” Serrena said, her scowl on full display.

“And you’re closer to a friendly rival and certainly not my lover, and I figured you’d be offended and insulted by the insinuation that you needed me, Mirae, or anyone else to look after you.”

Serrena smiled. “Right back at you, Lyse. And yes, a friend and a rival. Both of those sound nice.”

Lysette gave Mirae a long, final goodbye hug, then turned to Serrena. She held out her arms for a brief moment to offer the same, before remembering the conversation from last night and

thinking better of it. But to her shock, Serrena reciprocated, and the two shared a short, chaste, yet still nice hug before Serrena pulled back with a grin.

“That’s the first display of physical affection I’ve willingly shown to someone other than a relative. It will be the last for a good while.”

“Thanks, Serrena. And may our blessings smile upon all three of us.”

Serrena held back a chuckle. “Mirae, are you ready?”

Mirae nodded and grew out a pair of icy wings, teal, iridescent, and beautiful. One briefly rubbed against Lysette’s back for the briefest of moments, sending a shiver down her spine as Mirae leapt up and floated a few feet off the ground.

Serrena followed suit, creating a massive sphere of superheated air near her feet. An instant later, she let the pressure burst forth, propelling herself upward with the expansionary force generated. When she was about a dozen feet off the ground, she extended a jet of flame out of her feet and maintained her height via rocket propulsion. For a moment, Lysette nearly sweat from the intense blaze, until conjuring a sphere of ice to maintain a more comfortable temperature.

“Shall we then, Mirae?” Serrena asked.

Mirae nodded, taking the lead as they began their flight back to Ciricu with Serrena at their back. Lysette smiled, soft and wistfully, unclocking her left eye and using it to watch Mirae as they flew higher and yet higher into the sky, then off to the north as reds and oranges from the east heralded the new day’s onset.

For a time, Lysette simply watched, using the idea of practicing with her eye as a convenient excuse to see Mirae a little longer as they and Serrena flew off even faster. And, remembering

Kristil's earlier comment, she willed her telepathy out to her love, straining for a moment as it connected the two of them together.

*"I love you, Mirae. And I look forward to us being together once again."*

Mirae turned back for the briefest of moments. *"And I you, Lysette. Together forever, if I have anything to say about it."*

*"I look forward to it."*

Lysette's smile brightened as she headed back indoors and down the all-too familiar stairwell to her room. She knocked on the door, and upon receiving no response, Lysette opened it. She stepped inside and sat on her bed, but before she could get comfortable, Danitha's voice beckoned her attention.

"Lyse," she said. "We need to talk."