

Chapter 758 Feast

Ilea leaned back in the bath and closed her eyes, realizing she didn't remember the last time she had slept. *And here I thought my sleep schedule would be negatively impacted from my academic life.* She smiled to herself and sighed in a relaxed manner.

She got up about fifteen minutes later and dried herself with Embered Heart, clothes and her Mantle appearing before she teleported outside. “*See you,*” she sent to her eldritch friend as she made her way to the teleportation gate, now within a guarded stone building. Ilea was let through instantly, arriving inside with a group of Shadows.

“*Until next time,*” the Meadow spoke as the gate activated, transporting the entire group on the platform through the fabric.

They appeared in Morhill a moment later, Ilea nodding to the Shadows before she left the building and teleported through the city, soon reaching the gate for Ravenhall. She took one look at the queue and spread her wings. The guards still had to follow protocol when operating the gates, which meant they couldn't just fill the platforms and send everyone through time and time again. Money had to be processed and people had to be checked. Most weren't allowed to simply go to the Meadow's domain but the gate to Ravenhall was open to all.

Ilea teleported up and flew out of the busy city, spotting another wall being set up farther into the valley leading towards Ravenhall. Dozens of buildings were already cropping up within the new added territory, bored looking adventurers and guards protecting the mages from potential monster attacks.

The road to Ravenhall was mostly empty, one duo of dark armored individuals flying by at a lower altitude, Ilea unsure which organization they belonged to. She reached the city gates a few minutes later, the queue leading up all the way to the teleportation platform located a few hundred meters away from the city walls.

One of the guards waved her in and gestured above the wall.

Ilea flew past the defenses, seeing a ripple in the magical barrier. She spotted a few other flying people before coming to a stop above the Sentinel Headquarters. Teleporting down, she waved to the two card playing healers on guard duty. They scrambled to hide the game but she just gave them a look. *Didn't know there was a rule against that. Trian the strict Headmaster.* She found Kyrian in one of the training halls, the man watching two groups of healers fight.

“*Hey,*” she sent, establishing a telepathic connection. Her arrival immediately caused a few mistakes in the fight, Kyrian frowning at that and taking some notes.

“*You're distracting them,*” he said.

“*Yes. A good demonstration then. Maybe they can learn from it,*” she said.

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Really? Now?

“*Today's the day?*” Kyrian asked.

“Yeah, Evan let me know he should be able to spend a few hours with us,” she said.

The man nodded. *“I’ll be right there,”* he said and motioned to the Sentinels, getting their attention before he gave them each a few pointers.

Some of them glanced her way as they left.

“New faces,” she sent.

“Both groups are promising,” Kyrian said as he made his notebook vanish. *“It’ll depend on their resilience. We’ve had quite a few recruits quit in the last months.”*

“Festival led a lot of people to our doors,” Ilea said.

“Right. Some with noble backgrounds too. Trian makes sure they understand the training process but it’s not the same as actually experiencing it,” he said. *“Should we go? Gates?”*

“The Foundation doesn’t have any gates,” Ilea said and activated her third tier transfer, one of the destinations the desert south of Evan’s secluded oasis library.

The spell manifested and moved them to the sands, a dry wind blowing through, suns shining down with unrelenting heat. Neither of them really noticed the change.

Evan sat meditating in the sands, half covered by what had been blown onto him.

“One way to tell us we’re late,” Ilea said with a smile. *A necromancer might’ve just set down a skeleton... hey, I could do that. Just have to take off my head first, burn away all the skin. No, too much effort for a joke.*

The man opened his eyes and smiled. *“It was not my intention.”* He waved his hand, the sand moving away in a smooth arc. *“You arrive as we have discussed. And you have brought the curse mage. It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance, Kyrian. Little is known about you.”*

The man in question gave a nod. *“Is that a compliment? I know little about you as well.”*

Evan smiled as he floated up with the sands around him. *“I’m in the business of knowing things. Perhaps we can spend some of this time to get to know each other. Now, Ilea, today we are not to fight but to examine an item you have uncovered in your journey?”*

Ilea made some space between herself and the two people, summoning the silver hammer into her hand. Metal thorn whips instantly sprouted from the handle and bore into her mantle, whipping around to gain purchase or find another target. *“Seems angry,”* she said. *“It’s called Silent Memory, a divine quality object.”*

Evan took in the violent hammer with his deep green eyes, a contemplative look on his face.

A wave of curse magic flowed out of the thing, the sand mage’s robes moving with the expelled magical force. He nodded slowly, the sands moving him around Ilea, covering him as he moved closer. The silver whips slashed into his defenses until he was close enough, his outstretched hand touching the top bit of the weapon. He whipped his arm back. *“Blood manipulation, and potent bone magic too. This is quite an intricate creation. Its erratic nature is no wonder with the magical powers stored within. This much should not even be possible, but such is the fate of divine creations.*

“You mean you’ve seen something similar before?” Ilea asked.

Evan glanced at her as he retreated. "I cannot share too much on this. However the design is reminiscent of Sanguerrihn's creations. A revered dwarven smith that lived within the Naraza mountains. The designs are described and categorized within dwarven literature. He was found to have turned into a creature of the depths, his artifacts sought after by the followers soon worshipping him as a god of death, or rebirth. Some both. Entire cities have fallen to possessed cult members over the last few thousands of years. It is said his artifacts are encased in lead and cobalt, buried in the deepest caverns or thrown into the seas. It is unknown if the creature itself is still lurking, though the few who have claimed to have seen it called it a mad, whispering shade."

Ilea and Kyrian looked at each other. "You remembered all of that?" she asked.

He blinked. "I have my ways, Lilith."

"Very mysterious," she commented. "So you're telling me I have to have it encased and thrown out? Can I not just destroy it?"

"A difficult task. You may try. The safest option is the encasing, then burying it in a random location far away from any settlements. I suspect many divine creations or cursed objects are hidden just like that. Its magical aura resonates with living creatures. It should not be easily detected," he explained. "However... there is another option. One more dangerous, but you seem to be unaffected by its powerful set of magics."

Ilea looked at the red gem embedded into the thick chunk of silver metal, a thorn whip lashing out at her eye, unable to pierce the membrane protecting her organ. It did sting a little. She grabbed the thing and wrestled with it, the whip curling around her arm trying to bite into her armor. "Fuck off. You piece of shit." More whips lashed out at her.

"Divinity comes with a cost. And items with such power normally require some form of attunement. That or a trial, ritual, or a blessing. However the chaotic nature of this item... I believe a simple attunement should be sufficient," he said.

"You Do know a lot of things," Kyrian murmured.

Evan gave him an acknowledging nod.

"What do I do then?" Ilea asked.

"You use the hammer," Evan said. "You let it expel its magic into you. At some point... maybe... something will change."

"Terribly helpful," Ilea said as she looked at the thing.

Evan smiled. "To anyone else I would suggest not trying to use a divine item, let alone one as obviously dangerous as this. But you're Lilith after all."

"Guess I'll give it a shot then," Ilea said. *Between all the training I have to do anyway. Wielding a highly dangerous multi-magical cursed death tool sounds like a grandiose idea.* "Thanks for the information, Evan."

He bowed lightly. "Our Seekers more than appreciate your teleportation network. And the Meadow is certainly... an interesting being."

"Not exactly my work, but I'm glad your information gathering is going well?" Ilea said.

"We only seek to preserve, Ilea. You need not worry," he said.

“Yeah, sure. I’ve trusted people far more shady than you. Kyrian do you want to come back?” Ilea asked.

Evan looked at the man. “I would invite you for a conversation, if you are interested. I’m very curious about your history.”

“How far away are we from Ravenhall?” Kyrian asked.

“Took me a few hours of flight last time,” Ilea said. “Maybe half a day for you?”

“Can I call for you when I’m done?” he asked.

“Sure,” Ilea said and summoned a gate to below Karth. “I’ll see you in a few days, Evan.”

“A bountiful hunt to you, Lilith,” the man said.

The gate closed behind her, eyes immediately adjusting to the darkness. Her heat vision activated as she looked for sources around her. *Seems like another dead end. Well, let’s keep mapping.* She summoned her notebook and flew through a few stalagmites, soon attracting the first Hadranim in the area. Ilea summoned her divine hammer instead, quite familiar with the creatures by now. Enough to risk using the artifact. She assumed it would take some wear and tear until something would change. *Better get to work then.*

Ilea finally made her way back west a few days later, appearing on the mountain peak while covered in her ashen mantle. She checked her surroundings with her various skills, domain, far sight, heat vision, and Sentinel Huntress. Nothing suggested the passing of any powerful beings, nor did she see any movement beyond the serene swaying of needle trees near a distant mountain side to the south.

Summoning her key locator, she spread her wings and flew northwards, keeping an eye on the arrow as she flew low and fast. She reached the mountain range overlooking the Still Valley a few minutes later, arcane storms to the far north, high mountains all around. She kept a few kilometers away from the mist covered valley. Ten minutes later she sighed, seeing the arrow turn left. Twenty minutes and it pointed straight to the south.

Well. Fuck. It’s in the fucking frozen valley. She scratched the back of her armored head and reset her gate location. She opened another one to the Meadow and flew through. A few teleports later she stood in her room, the taleen map open on the locator device. *Should be around here,* she crouched in front of her map, trying to figure out which gate would be the best to get to Niivalyr. She needed elven advice. She decided to avoid using the taleen network but there were a few of their own gates already placed near the Isanna desert. Far away from the Foundation but the desert was its own frontier after all.

Alright. She vanished and used the network to get to the desired location, a small village built onto the side of the southernmost mountain in the Ravenhall territory. She arrived at the destination to the deep bow of an armored Dark One. Stepping outside, she already heard the sound of construction. Magical mostly but people still liked to use nails. And for that they generally had to use hammers. A wall had already been built, few buildings standing but the foundations of five more had been set into the somewhat steep decline.

Some people glanced her way but soon continued working.

Three adventurers stumbled out of an inn, nearly falling as they stepped onto the steep ground. Two of them held up their hands to get shade from the sunlight, another taking off his heavy coat.

“Fuck, tis hot here,” one of them said with a slight slur in his speech, glancing up to see the ash covered being. “Greetins Sentinel, eh.”

Ilea gave him a nod. She walked down the main road that had been added, more a stairwell than anything else. A main square seemed to have been chosen on a natural plateau, about twenty armored people gathered with tables and maps, the heavy packs and lizard like pack animals nearby suggesting an expedition. She even spotted a single Sentinel, the man nodding her way as she passed.

“*Good luck,*” she sent him and spread her wings.

“*And to you, Lilith,*” the young man replied, more of them now looking her way as she flew up.

Her wings thrummed with power before she shot southwards, quickly leaving the mountains behind as she entered the unforgiving desert. She made small adjustments during her flight as she focused on the mark left on Niivalyr.

A few hours later, she arrived, the location entirely hidden below the dunes. An ashen drill formed in front of her before she dug down into the endless sands. Her resistance helped and she soon transferred into the Praetorian facility.

Ilea twirled in the air, shaking off the sand clinging to her mantle before she landed, her wings dissolving into nothing. She blinked at the bright eyes of a group of Cerithil Hunters, gathered like feral ghouls around the carcass of a monstrous looking creature. Their faces and hands were half covered in blood, Ben quickly standing up as a chunk of meat slapped to the ground, his hands hidden behind his back as he used ice to clean his blood covered chin. Not very successfully.

He bowed and looked at her with a smile, sharp teeth blood covered and vicious, pale green light reflected off his blue eyes.

[Ice Mage – lvl 329]

“Greetings, Ilea. We were... unaware of your coming,” the elf spoke in a confident voice.

“You don’t have to hide what we are,” Elfie said as he stood up. “Dinner?” he asked, offering a chunk of bloody meat.

“It smells pretty rancid in here,” Ilea said, looking at the pile of bones in one corner of the room, chunks of green steel in another. *Fraternity Elves it seems.*

Three hisses resounded.

“She judges our ways,” Farthorn said as he extended his claws.

“Yes I do,” Ilea said, bursting into white fire.

“We won’t stand a chance,” Asay sighed. “But then I suppose I’m interested in a welcoming bout too. If it is, the reason of your presence allows for such.”

Ilea shrugged. “It’s been a while. Why not,” she mused. Elfie and Farthorn had made considerable progress, the former now at three sixty and the latter at three fifty one. Asay had only gained two levels, now at four fourteen. Not much compared to her own progress but the Elves did fight the same beings time and time again, machines they had likely faced thousands of times already.

Magic erupted all around, sending splatters of the dead creature flying, the elves advancing with fast teleportation, all their attacks crashing against her armor with little impact.

Ilea could gauge their magic now, dismissing their attempts as she advanced on her first opponent. She ignored the void magic and smashed her flame covered hand through the pathetic shields, grabbing Farthorn by his armor before she slammed him into the ground. Fabric tear ripped Elfie out of his protective dome, a knee to his groin and a punch to his face the greeting she decided on. She finished by breaking his leg, his hiss more annoyed than pained as he was thrown to the side.

Lances of ice struck her armor as a continuous beam of arcane energy burned into a hovering shield of ash. She hissed in a joyous manner, sending a few heat soaked and burning spears through the hall, explosions of near white flame reducing both their dinner and the nasty pile of bones to smoldering remains. *Mom is here to clean up the mess.*

She advanced on Ben, the poor elf unable to teleport against her aura. She grabbed his leg when he tried to slide away on a track of ice, twirling his body before she set him alight. Her hand raised, she kept him in the air with her space manipulation before she pushed him away with a wave of space magic, his form impacting the upper corner of the large hall.

Ilea summoned her rifle and aimed, using a few layered ashen shields to protect herself against the arcane magic coming from Asay. He wasn't weak by any stretch but her resistance was more than adequate. All the flames in the room vanished, consumed by her ash and brought to her, Embered Heart lighting up a moment later. The beam lashed out and cut through the Elf's barriers, coming to a stop on the last defenses held up by his hands.

The arcane magic shattered before he was sent flying.

Ilea reached him, twirling in the air as she grappled his form. The hall shook when she impacted the ground, Asay's face first to reach the stone of course.

She breathed out and smiled, cracking her shoulders as she looked at the slightly dazed group. "Your teamwork sucks."

Elfie cracked his nose back to the normal position, his own blood mixing with the one from the beast they had eaten. "You're not Taleen." His leg was already healed.

"Right. I forgot that working together against anything else just doesn't work," she deadpanned.

"It does, but we don't have to do it," Farthorn said, a slight limp in his step.

"You guys are lunatics," Ilea said, spreading her flames once more to clean out the disgusting hall. "It's good to see you."