

## Chapter 519 Catching up

Ilea didn't have to search far and wide for a start in the city. Instead she was found by a familiar face after rushing through the many houses for a few minutes.

"Finally," Felicia said as she came to a stop on the roof next to her.

"Was I expected?" Ilea asked with a smile.

The woman giggled, her near yellow eyes twinkling with the warm light from the houses and streets close by.

"Not exactly, but the whispers of the winds were not silent tonight. And you're moving incredibly fast." Felicia said. "We're short on time, as always. How long have you been here?"

"Just arrived," Ilea said.

"Good. We're still looking for the ritual site. Have been for nearly a day already. It's not in any of the temples but we're sure they're here," she said and jumped down.

Ilea followed.

"They?" she asked.

"We managed to find and destroy the ritual in Harchat, though those who were likely most heavily involved managed to get away. All high ranking members of the Order. We tracked them here and are reasonably certain they're still in this city," she explained and vanished.

Ilea tracked her with her sphere and followed, down below and into another part of the city Ilea had only glimpsed at.

"Most of Gyffold is underground. Especially the poorer districts. I assume you were successful in Yinnahall?" she asked.

Ilea nodded. "How do you know where I was?"

"The pirate arrived a few hours ago and joined the search. He mentioned that you found and disrupted the ritual in Yinnahall yourself but were busy with the cleanup," Felicia said.

"Something like that," Ilea said.

The woman laughed. "Let me guess, you tried to help out the city?"

"You think that ridiculous? I heard you changed but to that extent?" Ilea said.

Felicia looked hurt, slowing down and summoning something to drink. She took a few gulps and looked at Ilea, her black hair moving slightly in the wind that seemed to be present around her at all times.

**[Mage – lvl 248]**

"I don't think it ridiculous at all, Ilea. You always had a heart. Perhaps with your incredible power, you could even back up an unhealthy dose of idealism and hope. Ravenhall and Riverwatch are perhaps proof for that already, who knows?"

"No, I'm simply happy to know that you're still you," Felicia added with a bright smile.

“Neither of us is quite the same,” Ilea said but allowed herself a smile too.

“The ritual... we should inform the Order here,” she said.

Felicia nodded. “The pirate informed us of the circumstances in Yinnahall. We found similar evidence in Harchat. Velamyr thought it too high a risk to actually inform them but he did contact certain members of the nobility. It will take time to convince even those who would listen.”

“What about an evacuation? If there are no people here, they won’t be able to use the ritual,” Ilea said.

“If that incentive comes from us, the locals would see it as an imperial infiltration, trying to get them out of their highly defensible city. No, they won’t leave. Michael also confirmed that the ritual doesn’t need as much death as it had claimed in Odiah,” she said. “He told me he’s currently working on a solution for that which might reduce the victims here, even if the ritual is used.”

“Where are they now?” Ilea asked.

“We’re working in teams of two. The copy of Michael who was with me sought out the Pirate when I informed him of your arrival,” Felicia said. “We meet in our hideout every hour to discuss our findings but it’s just a matter of time until the ritual is used. They have the blood and space mages here.”

*Figured that out too, or did Hector tell them.*

“Any leads to find it?” Ilea asked.

“None,” Felicia admitted with a frown. “The Order here seems less corrupt. They’re loyal to the city and any suggestion of its destruction was only met with confusion and anger.”

“Didn’t you say you didn’t want to inform them?” Ilea asked.

Felicia looked at her. “I believe they were silenced afterwards.”

*Fantastic*

“Are we sure the next ritual is even here?” Ilea asked.

“There should be others. The Dawn Company split up to pursue smaller towns and cities in the north of the kingdom and strike teams of the Empire should have reached many in the south. Velamyr thinks it’s highly unlikely that the High King would use this ritual in the capital,” Felicia said.

“That lines up with my information. Which leaves Gyffold,” Ilea said.

“Which leaves Gyffold,” Felicia said and stored her bottle. “It’s nice to see you again.”

“I agree but we can catch up later, Felicia,” Ilea said.

“Are you telling me the great Lilith of Ravenhall can’t have a conversation while looking for a dangerous blood magic ritual site?” the woman said with a smirk, vanishing a moment later.

Ilea followed with a smile.

“You don’t look so good anyway. Have you eaten enough?” Felicia asked as they rushed through the city’s underground, hiding in dark alleys, appearing in empty rooms, and damp halls.

“I rarely forget to eat, not that it’s necessary at our power,” Ilea said.

“You don’t sound like yourself at all!” Felicia said and punched her shoulder as they walked through a stretch of busy streets that provided few areas to hide in. Various vendors, restaurants, and stores sold their goods here with little regard for the time of day.

“Maybe you should take a vacation after this is over,” Felicia said.

“I think I will,” Ilea said and chuckled, both of them wearing Baralia armor.

“I’ll try to make it change,” Felicia said.

Ilea nodded.

“I… know what Edwin told you. That for your help, you’ll get all our gold, everything our ancestors have built. It was not his to give but for what you did, I would give it up. Not my name but all we own,” Felicia said.

“I heard you’re leading your House now,” Ilea said. “What would you do if I took it all. Would you follow your dream to get a farm somewhere, get away from war and politics?”

Felicia giggled, reminding her of the girl she had met near Dawntree so long ago.

“No, Ilea. Not anymore. My father is gone and I was the one to kill him. If you claim what was promised, I will start again with nothing. As long as I remain alive, our name retains its power. Some of it at least,” she said.

Ilea laughed before she touched Felicia’s shoulder. “Don’t laugh, but I honestly forgot about Edwin’s promise.”

Felicia did laugh.

“I hoped as much,” she said after calming down. They were back to their fast paced search of the extensive underground. Occasionally they would stop and inspect enchanted areas or otherwise suspicious sections.

“Why bring it up then?” Ilea asked.

“Because I don’t want to deceive a friend,” Felicia said and looked at her. “Deep down I knew you wouldn’t want it, not if it meant anything to me. I’ll make sure to make the legacy of Lilith proud with what I do.”

Ilea nodded.

“I met Maria,” she said suddenly. “Speaking of my legacy.”

Felicia opened her eyes wide before she nodded. “She’s useful. Sometimes. It’s hard to keep her focused on anything that isn’t her broadening revenge. If she continues at the same pace, she’ll make enemies I won’t be able to protect her from. This war might cloud her actions but I already dread the questions soon to rise.”

“You don’t think she should be stopped?” Ilea asked.

Felicia appeared in front of an enchanted steel door, gesturing for Ilea to have a look.

“Why didn’t you stop her?” Felicia asked. “Even if I tried, I couldn’t.”

“She said she was working for you,” Ilea said.

Felicia smiled a bitter smile. “Maria knows which threads to pull, even if she told the truth. Though I suppose I wouldn’t expect you to fight her either way. Maria’s past at least explains her anger, her

want for justice. And for what she's done for us, it would take more than a few nobles' deaths for me to act."

"It's a delicate issue and in the end I simply hope she can somehow find herself again, not the monster she's become, her entire being consumed by vengeance," she said with a quiet voice.

"I heard about Edwin too," Ilea said, her reverse healing slowly destroying the enchantments in the door. "I'm sorry."

Felicia waved her off. "I appreciate it and I know you mean it for my sake. My brother wasn't perfect. He fought and killed, used, and manipulated. He saved me and Aliana, Maria too in the end. And he led us to our ultimate goal. He's not entirely lost and while it saddens me to see him in this state, I do think he deserves some if not all of it, if only for what we've done to you,"

"With our level of power, there is always a way to come back. He's still alive after all," she added with a giggle.

"You really did change," Ilea said and opened the door.

"I was a scared, hopeful little girl for most of my life. I questioned every step I took until I was paralyzed in stagnation. When my father died on that field, I felt like I could breathe again," Felicia said.

Ilea smiled and stepped inside.

"Did we find it?" Felicia whispered.

"No," Ilea said. "But I can't just see that and walk by, not even if the ritual goes off in half a minute."

Felicia nodded, her expression turning serious as the air started moving more erratically around her.

Ilea covered herself in her ashen armor before she blinked inside.

Torture and slavery seemed to go hand in hand. In a world where everyone had the potential to become a dangerous warrior or wielder of magic, the control through fear and pain required more than just chains.

She grabbed the whip mid motion, pulling on it to bring the slaver off balance. At the same time she healed the quivering man behind her, his back exposed and showing so many gashes it all flowed together. Enough blood had pooled below that she was surprised he even still breathed.

A thin blade of air cut through the slaver's neck, his head rolling onto the floor as his body collapsed.

A dozen guards rushed in from their posts before a whistle sounded through the hall.

"I need a little longer with these," Ilea said as her ashen limbs spread out to the various cages and torture machines, breaking mechanisms and healing those unfortunate enough to be here.

"Leave it to me," Felicia said, unaffected by Monster Hunter due to Ilea's second tier Veteran.

The air reformed around her as she ascended a few meters, a rush of wind spreading out and cutting into the confused guards. Most of them were killed on the spot, others just lost a leg or two.

Felicia finished them off with precise lances of wind to their heads.

Ilea finished her healing and silently displaced or broke the shackles, gates, and rope.

The other woman helped out silently, neither of them speaking the language of the natives.

“Take what you can, disguise yourselves and leave this place,” Ilea said before she vanished.

Barely a minute had passed. An unnecessary detour perhaps, meaningless if the ritual was activated anytime soon. And yet it was a detour she couldn’t ignore, not after seeing it through her sphere.

Felicia didn’t comment on it but the near wicked smile that slowly faded from her face suggested a similar mindset.

“The Class,” Felicia said, turning a little red at Ilea’s gaze.

“Berserker?” Ilea asked. She had given it some thought due to her third Class theorizing.

Felicia nodded. “I’ll try to get something else for my next evolution. I can keep it in check thanks to my main Class but sometimes it shows.”

“Has it overpowered you entirely before?” Ilea asked with genuine interest.

“Not fully, no. It helps cloud pain, helps me focus. Back then I thought it could give me an edge... a way to bridge the gap between myself and my brother. A way for me to become useful to him,” she said and shook her head, a complicated expression on her face.

“I’ve been wondering how much our Classes actually influence our thinking,” Ilea said as they continued.

“I think it goes hand in hand. We act a certain way, change in certain ways, and our Classes evolve accordingly. That again changes how we act and change. Perhaps we all move towards an extreme representation of who we are, who we think we are,” Felicia said.

“In the end they’re our tools. A representation of our magic and our power. I don’t think they make us into who we are but in a world where power is everything, there’s a chance that we might lose ourselves.”

“I agree. I do think there are more physical ways how the Classes affect us and how we think. I just try to avoid evolutions with descriptions that don’t fit me and my behavior,” Ilea said.

“Not everyone has the same amount of choices,” Felicia said. “I hope this war will open a few more doors for me than last time around.”

“You could always come on a hunt with me,” Ilea suggested with a smile.

“I’ve explored a few dungeons myself already. Being alone leads to the most benefits and with my regeneration I think I can grow without your help. I’ve been relying on others for most of my life. I do appreciate the offer of course. Maybe at some point, if we ever become equals,” she said and laughed.

“I suppose that’s only possible if you retire and I get a few hundred years to catch up!” she added.

“Make that a few thousand. I don’t plan to stop anytime soon,” Ilea said and smirked.

“That would be something... Ilea and Felicia. The thousand year old Empress and her ashen Shadow,” Felicia mused in a joking manner.

Ilea smiled. “I’m happy to hear you plan on becoming an ash mage. I’m sure I can put in a good word with the Hand to fulfill the second part of your prophecy.”

Felicia laughed. “I don’t think either of us really wants to become an Empress. I should shut my mouth too, this is treason!”

"I should report you to Velamyr," Ilea said.

"Please don't. His sense of humor is still in development," she said.

They continued in silence for a while, their search still yielding no clues.

With their high speed and perception, the two could search through whole districts in little time but that didn't mean anything if the enemy had hidden themselves too well.

"I mean it by the way. I've worked hard just to be acknowledged as the Redleaf heir," she said.

"You're not the only one who's grown in the last few years," Ilea said.

"I know. Why Lilith by the way?" she asked.

"Kind of just came up with it. It was a religious thing where I'm from," Ilea said.

"A god of sorts?" Felicia asked. "That's fitting."

"More a demon I think," Ilea said.

Felicia laughed at that. "Maybe I should think of an alias too. Put on a mask and purge some of the corruption in Lys."

"Isn't Maria doing that already?" Ilea asked.

"I don't think she'll continue to work with me forever. There's liberty in wearing a mask, or ashen armor I suppose," she said and laughed.

"There is," Ilea said.

"The hour is nearly up. Will you come to the meeting point too?" Felicia asked.

"Sure," Ilea said.

"These are the people you've been looking for by the way. The Golden Lily, was it?" Felicia said.

"They knew my father."

"Yes. Sadly they're not as obviously evil as I had hoped," Ilea said.

Felicia laughed. "My father was."

"Velamyr... well some might call him evil but I think he's pragmatic at best. He's entirely focused on Lys, which is good for me but I suppose the High King of Baralia wouldn't quite agree," she added.

"Did you talk to the others too?" Ilea asked.

"Michael mostly. He's a blood and gold mage, can make copies of himself which is quite impressive. His knowledge and skill in general are equal or even beyond Velamyr's. And that's just what he's shown. His copies are more talkative than the original I found but they still have to follow his orders."

"I think he's mostly based in Kroll. A researcher. One that cares about the advancement of magic itself and our use of it," she said. "I didn't tell anybody else but he shared some insights on these rituals with me."

"What do you mean?" Ilea asked.

“He believes he could create something similar. He called their work sloppy, their sacrifices unnecessary, and wasteful,” she said.

“Sounds more like a perfectionist than an empathetic beacon of morality,” Ilea said.

“You’re not surprised at his ability? If what he claims was the truth,” Felicia asked with raised brows.

“The Order could pull it off. And they didn’t strike me as particularly impressive so far. Strand could summon enough demons to wipe out Ravenhall, why shouldn’t there be others with similar capabilities? You and me both could slaughter thousands before we could be stopped, if we’re stopped at all. It’s just more messy and takes longer,” Ilea said.

Felicia sighed.

“Doesn’t mean we can’t defend against it at all. We’re trying a lot of things in Ravenhall. To prevent such a tragedy from ever happening again,” Ilea said.

“It would be impossible to convince the nobility of Lys to allocate the resources such an undertaking would require,” Felicia said.

“Then I suggest you use your seat among them to inspire some common sense,” Ilea said. “Maybe the rituals that happened here can bring some change.”

Felicia snorted. “Few of us really experienced one. If anything it will increase the restrictions on large scale rituals.”

“Would probably be better if they tried to understand them and created countermeasures instead of just banning the whole thing. If there had been a thousand experts on summoning runes and demons in Ravenhall, I’m sure the extent of Strand’s summoning would have been revealed weeks before he was ready to execute it,” Ilea said.

“Michael shared similar views,” Felicia said and giggled. “I’ll have to be a little more serious again in the meeting, I hope you understand.”

“Play your games, noble girl,” Ilea said.

Felicia laughed and rubbed Ilea’s ash covered head. “Way too rough,” she commented and smiled at Ilea’s amused look.

“That’s the point,” Ilea said.