

Ilea smiled under her mantle. She itched to provoke the assassins spread out around her. And she could tell many of them were eager to do the same. *A friendly fight. Ah but it's so very unfair.* Most of their faces were covered by masks or helmets but by the body language alone she could tell who had an idea about how dangerous she was and who thought themselves king of the world. Granted she herself was quite arrogant with her entrance but she just couldn't be bothered being accommodating with an order of assassins. She could accept the need for their existence on some level and knew that challenging them directly would lead to problems for her allies at the very least, but with all her power both personal and political, she could allow herself a little bit of leeway. Ilea hadn't faced Elementals to be intimidated by a bunch of level two hundred fighters.

None of them provoked her further, but she could tell that a few were very close to making a very, very bad decision. The assassin she had met before appeared once more.

"Please come with me," she said and made a few signs that Ilea couldn't interpret. The other assassins made signs back, most of them vanishing a moment later. Some remained and watched them.

"I appreciate it," Ilea said with a smile and joined the woman. She could tell how tense the assassin was. She believed her level to be the same as the last time they had met. "Might be good for you to meet a monster from time to time instead of killing weaker humans."

"My duties don't allow for a lot of free time, Lady Lilith," the woman replied.

Ilea didn't bother reply. Their roles had been predefined and she didn't exactly come here without prejudice. She followed the assassin up to a door with two guards. "*I wouldn't have killed anyone,*" she sent to her before walking inside.

The assassin gave her a slight nod before she too vanished.

Helena had her hair in a bun. She wore a bloodied apron and held a butcher knife, considering the neck of a dead furred monster, one Ilea hadn't encountered before. She smiled when she brought down the knife, cleaving through the bone and flesh with a wet sound. "Good evening, Ilea."

"Helena," Ilea said and waited for the woman to clean and put away her blade, the remains of the creature vanishing before her apron and casual clothes were replaced by a simple black dress.

"Did you come to kill me?" the woman asked in a calm voice, gesturing to the tea table where she sat down herself and summoned a kettle with two cups.

Ilea joined her and smiled. She didn't sit down "I'm definitely interested in fighting you. Or testing your guards, but no. I think I caused enough of a disturbance as is."

"I'd prefer my property to stay intact. I'm talking about the buildings, my employees are their own," the woman said.

Didn't have to clarify. Seems like she's a bit more guarded too. Ilea accepted the tea and summoned the relevant letter in exchange. She put it on the table and sipped on the liquid. The poison barely had an effect this time. She downed it a moment later and set down the cup.

Helena smiled, one hand below her chin. "Too weak for your tastes."

“A little,” Ilea admitted. “I’d wish to stay for tea but...”

“I understand,” Helena said and waved lightly.

“Enjoy your butchery project. A good evening to you,” Ilea said and vanished. She charged her wings. *I hope I didn’t overdo it. Ah well, what’s done is done.* And off she went.

Helena sighed. *You’re getting old, Helena.* Fifteen assassins appeared in her office a moment later. It annoyed her immensely that she couldn’t send them off immediately. *So very bold of her. To barge in like that.* She couldn’t help but smile. The girl once more reminded her of her younger self. But of the girl she had first met here in Myrefield, little remained. What she had met just now was a monster more powerful than even Maureen. *I’ll have to bother her with that too.* The fragmented reports were true. Ilea hadn’t stopped advancing. And everyone had hoped for her to die to one monster or another. The fact that she didn’t exactly like the main business Helena’s order provided had been a nuisance but now it could become more than just that. *Much more.*

She glanced at the letter, the seal depicting a tree surrounded by a variety of symbols, two of them being Ravenhall and the Medic Sentinels. *They’re making their move. And here this naive old woman thought she’d have another few decades. Ah the world is moving so quickly. Especially that brazen young ash mage.* She sipped on her tea and enjoyed the powerful poison within, feeling her body fight against the spice.

“She vanished northwards at high speed. Our scouts lost sight of her three seconds after departure,” Amara informed her.

Helena could tell how much her guardians were shaken by the woman’s appearance. *And yet again I’ll have to reaffirm my standing. An annoying move, Ilea. One I suspect you didn’t even intend.* She was grateful the woman had allies still that she consulted, before slaughtering at her hearts content. Human she remained but power had its way with everyone. And one wrong word or move could cause a lot of damage when the party in question wielded as much influence as the famed Lilith.

The enchantress informed her that the letter was safe. A precaution that for once might actually be warranted. Helena knew Ilea would face her directly, should the time ever come, but she couldn’t know about the woman’s allies.

She broke the seal and started reading. *The new queen is ready to present her power. At least the board will change once again.* “Recall the Ten,” she said. *Why Morhill. That place is so dreadfully boring.*

Ilea continued through the Empire, stopping at a variety of towns. Her entrance, reputation, and power resulted in a near immediate audience with whoever the letters were addressed to. She was struck by a variety of spells and projectiles more than a few times before that happened but the result was the same one every time. None of them were even close to as impressive as the assassins in Myrefield, which really made the more stubborn guards look that much more ridiculous.

Perhaps it was a lack of exposure to high level beings or just some kind of arrogance gained through decades of local superiority. Monster Hunter and an impenetrable defense came through however. Just like they did now, her ash breaking open a steel gate to a small castle's courtyard with frozen guards all around, most of their weapons drawn.

It was getting somewhat late, to be fair. And she did look quite intimidating with her mantle covering her form. "I told you I'm just here to deliver a letter," she said and looked at the thing again. "Neil Fenras," she repeated. "Or is this the wrong place?"

A group of guards looked at her before they glanced at each other, the effects of monster hunter gone after a few seconds had passed. "Lord Fenras wishes not to be disturbed after sundown," one of them got out, gripping his sword and shield with a renewed focus. He gulped.

"Alright. I can also leave and you can inform your Lord that Lilith was sent packing because he's busy doing whatever," she said and checked within her dominion. She found two people engaged in what looked like a blood magic cult situation but neither seemed anything but aroused. *The largest room too. I suppose that's the man in question.*

The guard gulped again and looked between the small castle and Ilea. "I...,"

"He's the one in the largest room, third floor on the other side?" she asked.

The reactions were clear. And so she simply made the letter vanish. It appeared on the bed next to the two *cult* members who jumped away with frantic movements, the man opening the letter as soon as he realized what it was. He said something and rushed to put on pants, the other man doing the same, hiding the ceremonial dagger in a random drawer.

Ilea waited until the Lord burst out of the door. His eyes quickly found her. "Good evening, Lilith."

She gave him a nod as her wings charged. "The same to you," she said and ascended. Ilea made sure the recipients at least saw her for a moment to make sure they wouldn't dismiss the letters. The seals and everything were present of course but a personal delivery would be seen as more. An honor, or maybe a challenge. Of course she assumed a few of them thought her to be a Sentinel or Shadow too but the effect would be similar for someone who couldn't differentiate.

Last one in the central plains. Which makes Virilya the next stop. She flew over dark lands, the bad weather moving southwards as she soon came out to an open sky, starlight bathing the grasslands and forests in a faint blue hue. The only letter she had for the capital was for the Empress herself. She assumed the woman would then choose the Virilya nobility that would attend in turn. Either that or Claire had plans to contact them at a later time. Ilea would make sure Felicia was informed one way or the other.

Now. I assume she's in the central district. Attention or something a little more subtle? She considered for a few minutes as she flew over the wilderness, monsters occasionally glancing up to look at the distant flying form. *Hmm, I don't know her. And I don't have any qualms with her either. No reason to antagonize the woman for no reason. I do hope she's up at least.*

Ilea hit an unfortunate owl like monster on the way, the thing exploding in a mist of blood and bits, food for whatever creature would find the remains. The air pressure cleaned off whatever had clung to her ash in the next few seconds. The rest of the flight concluded without further issues. She saw the distant walls of Virilya, the many lights within shining upwards. Already she couldn't make out the stars quite as well as before, the capital of Lys one of the few places in the Plains with enough light pollution to cause such an effect.

She landed with her mantle intact, right in front of the closed eastern gate.

A guard in a small barred window to the side of the massive city gate nearly fell from her chair when the woman landed.

"Evening," Ilea said. Mostly to make sure she didn't think her an attacking monster. The only other travelers she could see was a group of armed people running towards the gate about two kilometers out. Ilea squinted her eyes when she saw flashes of magic. "Looks like they're in trouble. I'll be right back," she said and spread her wings once more. The guard didn't have time yet to gather her wits for a reaction.

Geronimo felt his legs burning as he ran. He turned around as soon as his crossbow was loaded, aimed, and shot a bolt at the stalking beast.

It dodged to the side and snarled, rushing forward when a bright explosion cracked in the air in front of it, once again pushing it back.

Jane cried out, the woman stumbling with her leg twisted to the side.

Fuck. Geronimo watched the humanoid creature retreat a few steps, intelligence in its eyes as it looked his way. The thing was playing with them. *And we're so close to the city.* The three uninjured adventurers regrouped, Eleonora collapsing to one knee as she sent out a group of birds, two aimed towards the city.

Geronimo watched as the Beastwolf circled around them with speed it hadn't shown before. He tilted his head to the side a little when he saw the beast jump up and slash through the two birds. "Nobody will come," he whispered to his allies. "Prepare y-"

The airborne wolf creature exploded in a mist of gore, limbs and bone flying aside before a shower of blood splattered down on the grass and the beaten group.

Geronimo wiped away the blood to see two black wings flap where the creature had just been, its head held in an armored hand before it was thrown aside. He looked at a creature of darkness, two horns on its black helmet with blue eyes staring back at them. He turned and rushed to the fallen Jane but found the winged creature already there. He took a few steps back as he watched the wound close on the woman's leg, the process near instant and happening without touch or visible magic.

A *Sentinel*. He had heard of them of course, but to see one was a rarity. Only a few of them had been near Virilya. The stories had been dismissed as fabrication early on but some had doubts, knowing who stood behind the new healing order. As time went on, the tales no longer seemed outrageous, too many confirming anecdotes painting a single picture. One both inspiring and terrifying. He didn't know how to react, deciding that going to one knee was appropriate. He heard a laugh and looked up, seeing the woman land before she helped Jane stand up, black wings dissolving.

"Who... wh-" Jane stuttered.

"I'm flattered. But there's really no need to bow before my greatness, Geronimo," the Sentinel spoke.

He raised an eyebrow.

[Battle Healer – lvl ???]

What.

The man rubbed his eyes a few times and tried again.

[Battle Healer – lvl ??]

I'm spent.

"Ilea?" Eleonora asked in a confused voice, her knees on the ground as she looked at the woman.

The Sentinel raised a finger to her mouth as her armor receded, revealing the familiar black haired healer Geronimo had met so long ago in Riverwatch. "I go by Lilith in these parts," she spoke with a smirk.

"Gods above, you're Lilith?" Geronimo asked. "Want to grab a drink sometime?" He had to try, even knowing that half his gear was damaged, his face sweaty and covered in blood. Blood from the wolf she had killed. *I have to try.*

Jane shook her head as she approached him. "She saved us, keep your dick in check for once in your life."

"You don't understand, Jane. This is the one time I cannot do that," he said and straightened, locking eyes with the woman. He gulped as her look turned to something different. *Monster*. He stood his ground but he knew he would've preferred to face the wolf. Only the fact that he had met her before kept him there.

She smiled. "Sure, how about now? I'll invite the whole group. Hey Eleonora," Lilith spoke and waved to the bird tamer.

Geronimo blinked his eyes as a mist of ash flowed over them, a warm feeling spreading through his body and mind at the same time. He felt refreshed immediately, all the small cuts and bruises from the past few days gone. "So," he started, moving a hand through his hair. "What's going on?"

"Nothing much. I have a delivery for the Empress. What about you? Back from a job?" Ilea asked. Or Lilith. Geronimo had difficulties bringing them together in his mind, or keeping them separate.

"Yes, and then the Beastwolf started hunting us. We had the situation under control however," he said.

"No we didn't. You saved our lives," Jane said. "Thank you, Lilith," she said and bowed before she walked over to him and grabbed his arm. "You know her?" she whispered.

"I... I'm not sure," he said and glanced at the woman. He saw her tilt her head lightly, a smirk on her face. *The same smile. Gods she's hot.*

Jane slapped him. "Focus."

Ilea moved past. "We met in Riverwatch a few years back."

"You... changed... a lot," Eleonora said, looking at her cleaned hands. "Thank you," she added with a bright smile. "What kind of creatures have you met? I want to hear some stories!"

"Quite a few. Some more interesting than others," Lilith said and joined the woman. "Do you guys want to walk? You look quite exhausted, no offense."

"What other option is there?" Veya asked, a little reserved. She had watched the scene unfold without a word so far, her armor, sword, and shield cleansed by the ash as well.

"I want to see it anyway," Eleonora said, walking over to Lilith before she slowly grabbed her arm, as if approaching a dangerous animal. Perhaps the comparison wasn't that unfitting.

Geronimo couldn't say anything before his vision blurred. It happened again less than a second later and a third time before they stood in front of the capital walls. *What was that.*

Eleonora clapped her hands and jumped up, a few of her birds flying away from her at the motion. "Amazing! What kind of magic is that?"

"That's a secret," Ilea answered, laughing when she saw the other woman pout.

"You're the real deal...", Veya mused. "Huh."

"Why did you never tell us?" Jane asked, looking at Geronimo. She had calmed down by now, her voice sounding tired more than anything.

"I didn't know. She was strong back then, sure, but not even at level one hundred. Is it alright if I share that by the way? I trust them," Geronimo said.

Ilea shrugged. "The people who care enough to dig up the information know more than you anyway. Maybe don't spread it around, for your own safety."

"Holy fuck... you're like a mythical creature," Veya said. "Is it true that you can't be injured?"

"No. But I'm pretty tough. Try to stab me with that thing," Ilea said and pointed at her sword.

"Now?" Veya asked, a strange excitement blossoming on her face.

"Not now please," Jane said. "Can we get inside first? I need a bath."

"And drinks," Geronimo confirmed, though he was curious about Ilea's powers too. *She was an exceptional healer but they say Lilith fought an entire army.*

"Do you know a place in the central district?" Ilea asked.

"I do. It's pricey though, and I doubt our group will even get in," Geronimo said.

"I'll figure something out. Everything on me of course," Ilea said and waved to the guard.

I either died out in that field or I'm the luckiest man alive. He glanced at Jane and smiled, the woman not even rolling her eyes this time. It was motherfucking Lilith after all.