

Chapter 806 Silver Storm

Ilea waited for the signal. She crouched in the underbrush, fir trees all around. Sunlight broke through nearby, the machines in the shadows. Dozens. Hunter Praetorians and Executioners.

“Guards patrolling the forests and castle walls. No identifiable affiliation. Undetected approach uncertain,” one of the marks sent, a Shadow based on the voice she didn’t know.

Ilea relayed the information to Aki.

“Most optional approach through lake. Enchantments present,” another voice sent.

“Enchantments I could probably get around,” Ilea sent to Aki after relaying the information.

“With this many guards it may be the most reasonable option. No gates found in the surrounding forests. We have to assume they’re heavily guarding any room that would be reachable through the lake,” Aki said.

“They don’t have anything that could stop me,” Ilea said and looked to the team she had been with initially. *“You come with me, hide me until we’re in the water and close to the castle,”* she said.

“Aki, you take out the guards and prepare another force in Iz. I’ll open a gate once I’m inside.”

“Agreeable. If you find any gates, leave them intact. Just prevent anyone from using them,” he sent back.

“Risky,” Ilea said.

“No. They will know that they’re under attack if they cannot teleport here,” he answered.

Right. “I’ll keep it in mind. Just make sure to have more machines at the ready, I’ll reopen the gate as I go.”

“Then let’s go,” Aki said.

“When you hear or see Guardians move in, you attack. Prioritize those who can hide or teleport far,” Ilea sent to two marks of each team. Then she waved to her own group, several spells activating to shroud them in shadow.

“One person gets through and the plan fails,” Aki said.

“No pressure, daggerspehre,” Ilea said as she moved out with her group.

She could soon see glimpses of the castle through the thicket. A splendid structure with a main set of walls and a second one higher up and to the right. White stone towers with pointy tips reached for the skies, sunlight reflecting off dozens of windows.

“Do we know who this belongs to?” she sent to Raka.

The woman glanced her way and shook her head. *“Not yet. I don’t think public inquiries make sense at the moment. But we’ll know sooner or later.”*

Ilea felt the tension rise as they saw the first guards in the distance. They circled around and soon saw the shimmering lake, bright blue water reflecting the sunlight. Green fir trees lined the shores all around, the castle itself built onto a small hill overlooking the lake.

“I’ll move us all into the water. Keep your spells up and hold your breath,” Ilea said. *“On three, one, two-”* She moved them all as deep and far as she could, the body of water large enough to prevent a visible change from the sudden additions to its marine life.

She oriented herself based on her marks, the light just barely piercing to the bottom of the lake. *“This way,”* she sent to the others and spread her wings, ashen limbs moving out to pull the others. She didn’t want to use any other teleportation spells in case there were hidden detection enchantments close by.

Half an minute later, they had reached the base of the hill, slowly moving through the reed with as little disturbance as they could manage, the occasional fish swimming past, no monsters attacking the shrouded group.

This is it. Now let’s not fuck this up, Ilea thought, pushing away the potential impact of failure. *“Ready?”* she asked her group.

They affirmed.

“And remember, don’t destroy any gates,” she said. *“If we can stay hidden, we scout first.”*

Ilea moved closer until she could perceive the enchantments flowing over the wall within her dominion. She couldn’t see past it. There were anti space magic enchantments present, and quite a few detection spells. Recently added too, she felt, but not comparable to what the Meadow had prepared her for.

Fabric tear activated and brought them all past the white walls.

And into a storage hall. Dozens of wooden crates littered the stone floor, some stacked, most of them closed up. Ilea instantly saw the animals, monsters, and people within some of the crates, near all of them alive. Her sphere was no longer restricted, allowing her a view through a large part of the castle. Behind them and where the lake would be were large rooms with guards present, a few of them playing a game of cards on a small table. She could see the same Baralia insignia on a helmet, one on a ring.

She couldn’t find any gates though it seemed they were still hidden. *“One more,”* she said and used Fabric tear.

They appeared in a spacious feast hall, a few naked slaves serving food to armed warriors and mages. There were four gates in the hall, all of them guarded. Dozens of people were present, most of them sitting at or standing near the long central wooden table, few were drinking, but everyone was armed and armored. Fire burned in two hearths at the other side of the white walled hall, a single blood red carpet stretching through its entire length.

Tricky.

Two mages looked towards their shrouded group.

“Time’s up, move in,” she sent to Aki and opened her gate. Fabric tear activated and moved every person she could perceive right under her gate to Iz, the first two Executioners rushing out near instantly, their thin blades slicing through the guards and mages faster than they could cast a spell.

Ilea’s aura prevented further teleportation as more machines rushed out, her team spreading out. Burning ash moved through the hall with spears piercing low level fighters before they could call out for help or rush to the gates.

Seven Executioners were through and rushing to the gates when Ilea teleported once more, taking two of them with her. She had perceived most of the outer castle by now, appearing in a large room where something prevented her sphere from seeing inside. The Executioners rushed out to either side, fast steps through the air before they sliced through three people.

Ilea herself spread her wings to reach the blood mage frozen with his knife posed above a gagged and naked woman. One of her wings sliced the level two hundred man in half, his teleportation failing against her aura. She reopened her gate, more Executioners rushing in as the first sounds of battle resounded. *Too early.* She ignored the large pool of blood and the near two dozen corpses required to fill it, continuing her teleportation up and through the castle.

She moved up and into the largest tower, finding a well furnished master bedroom, four naked men chained to the bed. She followed their gaze and moved her wings, flying into a side room where a gate resided. Ilea closed her hand around the woman's neck when they both vanished.

She appeared inside a wooden pavilion, breaking the struggling woman's neck with a violent motion as she felt a slight residue of space magic flow through her from the gate. Ilea checked the surroundings for a split second, seeing a luscious garden, her marks suggesting they were still in Nipha. Nobody else was there. She opened a gate to the Meadow's domain and stepped through, instantly activating her third tier transfer as she threw the corpse aside, seeing the illusion mage sit in place with wide eyes.

Focused on the mark set on Raka, Ilea appeared amidst the battle, somewhere below the castle. She watched two Executioners tear through a dozen enemies, their formation broken near instantly.

Another teleport brought her down, still looking for gates but she found no more. The whole castle seen through her sphere, she chose to help in the fight but most everything was cleared out already, Executioners and Hunter Praetorians coming in over the walls, the gates protected by the silver machines in case someone appeared from the other side.

The Sentinels and Shadows quickly changed some of their gear to take over patrolling, in case any scouts looked at the castle from a distance.

Ilea appeared in the master bedroom where two Executioners were present, one moving the chains from the four men. She looked out the open balcony door checking the skies for anything that might've flown out. "She was the only one here?"

Two of the men immediately nodded, a third one looking at the silver Executioner, the fourth one staring at her.

The gates didn't explode either, she thought, looking at the creation embedded into the room where an Executioner now loomed. "She managed to activate it. I don't think I was seen, but who knows," she sent to the machine.

"We will find out in about six hours," Aki answered. "You will have to remain, or I won't be able to resupply the Executioners."

"I'll make my rounds," Ilea said. "Just tell me where."

She looked around the room. Wooden shelves with nicely carved patterns full of leather bound tomes. A comfortable carpet, beast heads hanging from the walls. And paintings. Quite a few of them.

“That’s her, Miss. The master of this castle,” one of the men spoke, his skin was black, his eyes green. He looked to be in his early twenties, a muscular build but a low level. He nodded to one of the paintings.

All four of them were still on the bed, uncertainty in their eyes as more Executioners entered the room to protect the gate.

“We’ll get you out of here in a moment,” she said and looked at the painting. It depicted a pale woman with fiery red hair, wearing a dress made for battle, a sheathed rapier at her hip. “Who is she?”

“She never shared her name, Miss,” the former slave said.

“What is yours then?” Ilea said.

He looked at her. “I do not have a name, Lilith.”

“And yet you know mine,” she said.

“It is Pierce,” another one of them whispered, a pale man in his thirties. “I heard it once, from Yelan.”

“Pierce,” Ilea murmured. “Are you sure?”

“I’m certain, Lady Lilith, I swear it on my life,” the man spoke.

“You can either stay here or be with the Meadow. I’m not sure what’s less of an issue,” Ilea said.

“*Get me Wayland to the Meadow’s domain,*” she sent to Aki.

“*I already informed him,*” the Executioner sent back. “*First change is coming up, two minutes.*”

“*What about the gates?*” Ilea asked.

“*We wait. Once somebody arrives, we will have to infiltrate wherever the respective gates lead to, and repeat what we did here,*” Aki said.

Now if that isn’t an annoying waiting game, Ilea thought, hoping she hadn’t already alerted someone on the other side of the bedroom gate.

“*Wayland is there,*” Aki informed her.

Ilea opened the gate and watched the man step through with two more groups of Sentinels.

“*In case more places require to be infiltrated,*” Aki informed her.

An additional Sentinel walked through the gate, a little larger than the others. Savage ashen claws extended from his hands as he looked around the room, his entire body covered in rugged black armor. He nodded her way and walked past.

[Ash Berserker – lvl 324]

Gael is ready to fight. As usual. At least his growth isn’t as ridiculous as the last time I’ve seen him.

“Elizabeth,” Wayland murmured. “Interesting.”

He stood before the painting of the pale rapier wielder.

“Elizabeth Pierce,” Ilea said, wracking her brain as to where she had heard the name before. *Hector*. She opened her eyes wide and addressed both Wayland and Aki. “*She’s part of the Golden Lily. And one of those who might’ve voted against my own addition to their hidden Order.*”

“*She’s also one of the most influential current nobles in Nipha, though few know of her power. Elizabeth is self centered and power hungry. It would make sense for her to see you as a competitor, though I assume you were mostly irrelevant to her until the Accords presented their gates and made their presence known to the world,*” Wayland answered. “*She is dangerous. If not for her personal power but her ruthlessness. And now that a member of the Lily is involved, we should tread even more carefully.*”

“I was led to believe that Helena is not a part of this,” Ilea said. “Do you think that’s a lie?”

“Impossible to say for now. The Heavenly Sweets have not sent a warning, and I doubt none of them have found out about the upcoming attack,” Wayland said.

“She’s alright with it then,” Ilea said.

“Though she will claim they have not learned of the attack. It truly is just an assumption. Our informant offered the plans in exchange for a large sum of gold, having recently gotten in dept due to a set of unlucky card games,” Wayland told her. “Which is irrelevant, but there is a slight possibility the Heavenly Sweets truly don’t know this is coming.”

“Convenient,” Ilea said. “Did we find Squiggly by the way?”

One of the Executioners glanced her way. “*Pieces only. It seems some of the adventurers had various creatures fight each other in one of the cellars. I have informed Claire. She suggested we inform Cless that Squiggles escaped into the lake and now roams the lands of Nipha.*”

Ilea raised her brows. “Let that be Claire’s decision.”

She opened a gate to switch out the Executioners, teleporting down to do the same in the feast hall before she returned to Wayland.

“You four are willing to testify?” he asked the men, handing out sets of clothing summoned from a storage device of his. Disguises he had used before it seemed.

All four confirmed.

Wayland cast a spell that masked sound before he spoke.

“Wonderful. We’ll have heaps of evidence then,” he said. “Enough to justify a war, if their attacks go through.”

“We won’t have a war,” Ilea said.

“No. Not if we can avoid it. But it’s always good to have options,” the man answered.

“Worst case I fly into their palace and grab their nobility,” she said.

Wayland gave her a long look. “That would solve the problem of Nipha, yes. But it would just heighten the legend of Lilith. This is our chance to show that the Accords are not just a collection of technology, but a well organized alliance. One willing to engage entire nations in warfare, if such is necessary.”

“You want to send a message?” Ilea said.

“They wish to sow chaos,” Aki said. “Now that we know of their plans, we can turn the tables.”

Ilea smiled. *“I’m glad you’re around, Aki. Without you this whole thing could’ve ended exactly like they planned.”*

“My existence may be the main reason this came to be in the first place. We should prepare for the night, and hope few or none of the gates will be used,” the Executioner answered.

Hours passed before the first of the gates was used, five rough looking adventurers appearing and immediately apprehended by a group of Sentinels and Executioners. The fact that they started to puke due to the shitty gate tech made the whole process quite simple. Late arrivals according to them, a team of specialized Shadows using the gate to check if their claims held up. They returned a few minutes later, the damage to their lungs and eyes healed by Ilea.

The gate led into a mountain range in the northern plains, the Shadows entering the small settlement and leaving without being seen. Raiders, hired by their enemies to participate in the upcoming fighting.

Ilea returned to the master bedroom, a layer of ash on the bed before she sat down and looked at the Executioners. *“They didn’t even know about the Guardians,”* she sent to Aki.

“I am not yet in every corner of the Plains,” he spoke. *“You’ve been fighting these machines for years. Destructive even to the highest level Cerithil Hunters. Humanity does not yet know what the Taleen armies are capable of.”*

“Your armies now,” Ilea said.

“The armies of the Accords,” Aki said when the master bedroom gate activated.

Ilea saw a woman appear, a simple cloak shrouding most of her facial features, two daggers on her hips, her leather armor well made but nothing obviously striking.

Her eyes widened before she started coughing. “Damn... illusions...” she retched before summoning a bucket, puking into it, her hood falling to reveal short black hair and bronze skin below.

[Assassin – lvl 272]

Ilea sat on the bed and leaned slightly forward, her anti teleportation aura present. “Hi.”

The assassin made the bucket vanish and rubbed her eyes turning around to see the Executioners, two of them with their blades next to her. She raised her hand and coughed again, touching the tip of a silver blade as her eyes widened. “Shit.”

“Who are you, why are you here?” Ilea asked.

“I...” the woman started, avoiding eye contact. “Y... you’re real, aren’t you?”

“I’m real, now answer the question,” Ilea said.

“I’m Fania. An Assassin working for a former Baralia noble. I was educated and trained in Navetihin and was a member of the Fading. I don’t want to die. This is too early,” she said, the last bit with a little confusion.

“You didn’t fully answer,” Aki said.

“I’m here to check if the girl has been apprehended and if she’s ready to paint,” the assassin said. “I’m expected to report within the hour.”

“Why should we believe you?” Ilea asked.

The woman considered. “I know names. I know how many guards are in the mansion beyond this gate. I know you’re looking for Elizabeth Pierce, and Walton Pierce. You’re here... which means... it’s going to be a slaughter. Not the one Kerthin hoped for.” The woman smiled then giggled to herself.

“*Wayland on the way?*” Ilea asked Aki.

“*Yes. Walton is part of the Pierce family, and Kerthin is the name of a former Baralia noble whose body has not been found, nor is she still part of any remaining city government. We should let her talk,*” Aki said.