

Chapter 492 Arrangements

“I told you! You dunce, you should listen before you get yourself killed!” Ember said, finding her courage as she stood up and walked towards the woman. “Why are you here anyway, I told you I’d go my own way.”

“I keep an eye out for everyone who’s left. I’m sorry... someone saw you with a high level healer... I thought they...,” Diana said, the two hugging each other.

“Heartfelt, isn’t it,” Hayden commented.

Ilea grunted and finished her ale, motioning to the bartender for another one.

“Why are you here? Did she hire you?” Ilea asked.

“I owed her. Not the facing Lilith kind of debt,” he said. “Most of the Corinth spies and paladins who remained were quite weak.”

Diana let go of Ember and stepped closer to Ilea, bowing deep before she spoke. “My sincerest apologies, mistress Lilith of Ravenhall. I had mistaken you for a member of the Corinth Order.”

“I don’t exactly look like one, do I?” Ilea asked. She looked at Hayden.

“You’re quite charming. Different clothes maybe,” he said.

“Do I behave like one?” Ilea asked, looking back at the healers.

“Not like one of those we have to worry about,” Ember said.

Diana’s complexion turned from pale to red as the conversation took its course.

Ilea threw the weapon upwards and caught it by the blade, holding it out towards Diana. “You’re lucky you know Ember,” she said.

The woman nodded, gingerly taking the blade before she sheathed it with some level of capability.

“I’m sorry,” Diana said again.

Ilea waved her off. *I’m used to stupid shit happening when I’m in cities.*

“I was just discussing a potential new start for Ember here,” Ilea said. “Maybe you’re interested too.”

Diana immediately squinted her eyes. “You trust easily. What new start is this you speak of? There are plenty of offers out there too good to be true.”

“I don’t need to trust you,” Ilea said. “There is literally nothing you could do to me. If you’re a spy, which I don’t think you are, then go inform your Corinth leaders that Lilith has taken a few of their ex healers into her protection. If they want them back, they’re free to visit.”

Diana gulped and sat down. “What do you offer?”

Quite desperate, are we? Well it’s understandable, Ilea thought with a smirk. “Are you in hiding? To need a Shadow for protection means you’re not exactly safe.”

The woman looked around, glancing at the barkeeper before she spoke, in a whisper. “The Order doesn’t take kindly to those who would betray it. We are members for life. We’re lucky that Ziva is somewhat reasonable, otherwise we would have all been slaughtered anyway.”

“What a waste of healers,” Ilea commented.

“Logic is not a skill one is born with, nor part of many Classes,” Diana said.

“I can offer you lot jobs in Ravenhall, fair wages and something you don’t abhor doing. Maybe more than that, if you prove yourself to be trustworthy,” Ilea said.

“I thought you didn’t need to trust us,” Diana said.

Ember had sat down again.

“I don’t. But others would prefer it that way. How many are there?” Ilea asked.

The woman considered, glancing at Ember before looking at Hayden. “You’re sure this is The Lilith... the Shadow?”

Hayden nodded. “I suggest you take what she’s offering.”

“Twenty three. And two more who remain loyal to the Order. I suggest you do not extend your offer to them,” she said, her tone making it clear how she thought of them.

“I see. Well I’m sure they’ll be fine. How are your levels, gear, and gold looking? Can you make the trip?” Ilea asked.

Diana opened her mouth a little. “To Ravenhall? I’m the highest leveled among them. We’re not fighters, we’re healers.”

“I’m both. And you were ready to use that blade when you came in here,” Ilea said.

“I would have died,” Diana said.

“True. You would have,” Ilea sighed. “I don’t feel like ferrying you to Ravenhall. Hayden, can her debt pay for an escort?”

“The trip with horses and wagons would take three or four weeks. No, it does not. And before you ask, I don’t want the job either way. I will stay in Dawntree,” he said.

Ilea looked at the man and nodded. “What about the other guy, Levi?”

Hayden laughed. “Are you sure? After his stunt?”

“Her debt can surely pay for you transferring some information and a sack of gold to the man. I’m sure he would be delighted to fulfill a personal request for me,” she said.

“I’m sure he would. I’d say you need a few more people though. Some adventurers would surely be open for a protection detail to Ravenhall,” Hayden said and nodded to himself.

“Can I trust Levi with that?” Ilea asked.

“As theatrical as he is, he is a good man, and a powerful mage. Despite his poor showing against me. I can look for a few trustworthy adventurers too,” he said.

“Good. How much gold do you think is needed?” Ilea asked.

“Around eight gold for Levi, if it takes three to four weeks... let’s say you get eight additional people... around seven gold. Fifteen I’d say, give or take,” he said.

Ilea summoned twenty gold pieces and stacked them on top of each other. "Make sure they know that if these healers do not arrive in Ravenhall... I will investigate the matter personally. And I Really don't feel like doing that."

"Understood," Hayden said and took the gold. "You're a lucky one Diana."

"We cannot pay you back...", she said.

"Maybe Claire can deduct a little bit of your wages for a few years. With so many people it shouldn't be an issue," Ilea said.

She didn't really care about the gold but it already seemed like a very good deal, she didn't want Diana to run away because of her suspicions.

"Thank you!" Ember said and grasped her hands. "You have no idea what this means for us," she had tears in her eyes.

"Before I go, is it alright if I mark you, Ember? You'll be able to call for help if something comes up," Ilea whispered to her.

"Of course," she said without hesitation.

"Perfect," Ilea said and used Sentinel Huntress on the girl, watching the marking appear on the back of her hand.

Diana still didn't seem perfectly convinced but she tried to smile at least.

Is this how human traffickers do it? Ilea wondered, happy to know that her offer was actually legitimate.

"Now please excuse me, I'm sure you can deal with the rest yourselves," she said and downed the remaining ale, flinging a silver piece to the bartender.

Diana kept an eye on her back until she stepped out.

Let's see if my reputation is enough for her to trust me.

She said her goodbyes a few hours later, her clothes and armor appearing before her third tier blink activated.

Lorcan watched with a smile on his face, waving his goodbyes.

The view vanished a moment later, replaced by the large windows of her balcony.

"Puh, the air in here!" she said and appeared outside, opening the door behind her with an ashen limb.

The bow is so close now, she thought and chuckled, enjoying the fresh winds of ocean air, the smell of salt.

Ilea stored her clothes and jumped, closing her eyes before she slammed into the water. It felt good. Cool.

It felt like she was just one fish of many, not Lilith, the army destroying menace.

I'm sinking much faster than I should, she thought, the absence of scales in her home quite welcome.

Hmm, I wonder... she thought, blinking and displacing herself through the water without issues. Her ash expanded outwards behind her, the limbs fanning out and connecting to form fin like extensions twice the size of her body.

Ilea exclaimed, laughing underwater as the air pushed out of her lungs. She twirled, speeding up with her ashen fins, moving quicker than she ever had underwater.

She tried charging her wings, finding their power considerably subdued underwater. It was a surprise that they were more than an inconvenience at all.

I could act as a mermaid... the mermaid of ash, she thought to herself and giggled, realizing that she had been submerged for a few minutes already. And still it felt like she had barely entered the water.

Harmony of the Drowned, she thought and summoned the Drowning Bear ring. *Oxygen repository should work quite well too.*

She didn't wait for the skills to start taking effect, quite clean and satisfied as she teleported a few times, appearing back on her balcony. Her ash condensed, quickly drying her up with the help of Heart of Cinder.

Clothes back on, she blinked up and charged her wings.

"Hey can I test something with you?" Ilea asked, looking at the two Sentinels.

She had appeared in the training hall without notice, neither of them showing much of a reaction. Being kidnapped at night and taken to an unknown dungeon by her had taught them to be prepared for everything, at all times.

[Healer – lvl 20]

[Mage – lvl 40]

Both of them had some form of ash armor. "You can both heal yourself?"

They nodded.

Nathan and Luke I think, Ilea thought, remembering the names of the two. Nathan had the Ashen Sentinel Class and quite a few impressive feats during the dungeon dives she had taken them to.

Flare of Creation appeared around her right hand, the second tier giving her a little more control over what part of her body burned. The cost remained the same either way.

"Who has more Vitality and resilience?" she asked.

"Luke," Nathan said easily.

"I guess," Luke confirmed.

She turned off her auras and extended an ashen limb to the boy. "It will damage you and your regeneration should be affected. Just tell me by how much and if it changes your healing too. I'll make sure you don't die if it's too strong."

Two ashen limbs gripped him around his arm before she touched his hand, making sure she could just cut it off in case the fires were too strong.

The pale flame touched his arm, the boy wincing at the pain.

His health declined rapidly, then less so. Ilea cut off his hand and started healing. She noted he had disabled his pain perception at some point in the short time span.

He only looked at his regenerating hand.

She tested a few more times with the boy, the data he provided quite valuable.

His natural regeneration was reduced by nearly half, depending on where and how much he was injured. His healing too was affected, reducing the effect by about a third.

Considering the low level and power of the Sentinel, Ilea considered it passable. She hadn't used her auras to boost the spell after all, unsure if it would increase the rate itself. *It should at least be able to provide a similar bonus against someone at my level. Maybe even higher.*

She thanked the boy and vanished, smiling at the fact that he was nearly her age. Ilea had to admit that the difference between their first meeting and his appearance now was quite stark. A year or two and she probably wouldn't see them as boys anymore. Already they had been through more than many an adventurer sees in their life.

Speaking of adventurers, she thought and dissolved the mark she had left on Sophia. The Specters hadn't broken out, even after she had killed the five closest to the surface.

Another blink brought her down to the hidden part of the headquarters. *I wonder*, she thought and tried to displace herself behind the enchanted gates.

It failed but there was some feedback. "It's me!" she shouted immediately.

"Fucking idiot, causing a cascade of alarms and traps, come in please," Iana murmured as she tampered with the imbued gate, activating a few runes and sending out a few message tubes through the system Claire had introduced to the city. "I didn't hear the good news yet. You can do Space Magic now?"

Ilea nodded and walked inside. "Sorry for the commotion," she said and summoned the Taleen Key she had gotten. "I have a small gift as an apology."

"Please knock normally, this stuff is in place against enemy intrusion. Don't try to break through yourself... is that?" Iana recited before stopping. "Another one?! Christopher!"

The man looked out from one of their rooms and waved when he saw Ilea. "I told her it's probably you."

"Can't be too safe," Ilea said and glanced around. "Is Aki here?"

"He doesn't come down here often anymore, takes his job quite seriously. Is that another gate key?" he said and joined them.

"It's not like we wouldn't already be dead if that creature you mentioned decided to invade this place," Iana said, taking the key Ilea handed to her.

She closed her eyes and took a deep breath, smiling at Ilea as soon as the gates closed shut again. "Apologies for the rough welcome. You've been out for a few days. The Space Magic was yours, right? Or did you find an interesting item perhaps?"

“It’s mine. Got a Third Class at three fifty. It’s still kind of a secret so don’t shout it around,” Ilea said.

Iana waved her off and walked towards the Core. “You’re going to do that yourself, I’m sure. Not like we get out much anyway.”

“I told you not to work too much,” Ilea said and followed.

“How could we not, with the world changing stuff you find in your travels. This is the most fun I’ve ever had,” Iana said, her eyes focused on the key in her hands.

“It was tuned in to a place called the Izacan dungeon. I would suggest you don’t activate a gate to that place,” Ilea said.

“Without the Taleen gate circle, this key alone isn’t enough. It’s mostly just provides the authority to actually use it. There is however a lot we can learn. Now having two, we can understand the differences, more easily determine what enchantments are variable, and which are static,” Iana explained.

“You do your hacking, computer girl,” Ilea said.

“What?” Iana asked, dropping the question after a few seconds, the three entering the Core. “I don’t suppose your third Class has given you some understanding of Space Magic?”

Ilea waved her hand sideways. “Understanding... eh. I have Space Awareness. Maybe that will help. Also, my third tier resistance actually prevented the gate from working. Something to consider.”

“Nobody will reach that level of resistance from a safe teleportation gate,” Christopher said. “Second tier, maybe. After a thousand years of constant teleporting.”

“Greetings from Lorcan Agor by the way. Adventurer from Dawntree,” Ilea said as she stepped onto the platform. She had time and assumed the two were eager for some more testing.

“That old fart. Still alive. Well, greet him back if you see him again,” Iana said, making it clear that she didn’t have strong feelings for the man either way. “That was one of my early weapon storage enchantments... does it still hold?”

Ilea shrugged. “He had the sword out most of the time. There were times where I didn’t see it though, so I assume it still does.”

Iana smiled to herself.

“You’re standing on the platform. Do you have some time for tests?” she asked.

Ilea just nodded, deactivating her Space Magic Resistance and focusing on the wisps around her.

“Yep, hit me,” she smiled, spreading her arms.

“This part here doesn’t look perfect,” Ilea said, moving her ash onto the section of the platform where the wisps hadn’t looked like a perfect circle.

The two enchanters stood there and murmured to each other, trying to figure out the problem.

Ilea had noticed the patters quite quickly, the wisps in the small hall flowing together a little upon activation of the gate. They generally moved but after a few tries it became more clear how exactly.

The closest comparison she could come up with was water. Flowing water without the influence of gravity. She had seen a few pictures and videos from astronauts drinking or showing off water in zero g. This time the liquid was space, and mostly invisible.

Whenever the gate came close to activation, some of the wisps would move closer, even form somewhat of a circle. When the magic happened, a few parts were disturbed, some flowing out with greater speed.

The practical result was the teleportation of chunks of Ilea, instead of her full being.

She was honestly impressed how far they had come without the help of such an awareness. *My two little geniuses*, she thought with a smirk.

“You have that predatory look on your face again,” Iana commented, the two done with the fix.

“Let’s try again,” Christopher said.

Ilea rolled her eyes and nodded.

Her right leg was ripped off this time, and a chunk of the platform itself.

Both appeared on the other side, accompanied by a groan from Iana.

“Can we take a break? It’s getting boring,” Ilea said and marked the parts where the wisps had moved. This time there were four. *Like plugging the holes of a sinking icebreaker, riddled by four miniguns aimed by blind people.*

“Sure... I need a break too,” Iana said.

“We need to repair the gate first,” Christopher said and stepped onto the second platform.

“Don’t worry, you’ll figure it out. My Awareness is getting better too,” Ilea said and gave a thumbs up to the girl.

They accompanied her towards the exit, Ilea stopping a little before.

“Can you take a few steps back,” she said, spreading her ash into a sphere around her.

“What now?” Christopher asked, following her request nonetheless.

A mostly intact Centurion body appeared in front of her feet, Ilea waiting a minute to see if it would explode.