

Chapter 829 Heart

The battle was fast but decisive. Passed out Mava littered the grounds, those still conscious hunting for scraps left behind.

Ilea sat amidst the carnage, eating more snake meat as she pondered the devastating effects of Popi's weapon of mass destruction. She didn't tell any of the Mava that she had only shared about half of the cakes she had with her.

A more devious woman might've considered the blackmail potential of her possession but then Ilea really didn't feel like becoming a cake dealing middle woman selling pastries to desert fox creatures.

"Your gifts are overwhelming," Myr Iva sent, the fox lying on her stomach, her eyes half open. *"Was this your plan all along, Ilea?"*

She glanced her way and smiled. *"I didn't think it would be quite this effective. Now I can kill everyone here and have my own feast,"* She bit down on the piece of snake.

Myr Iva looked on in horror before her eyes narrowed. *"I know what you're doing."*

Ilea just winked. Slowly the Mava recovered. Everyone got at least a taste of some cake and while the music and magical performances hadn't entirely stopped due to her presentation of gifts, the whole process had certainly slowed down.

"What exactly just happened?" Octavia sent, the woman floating closer as she took in the battlefield. *"Did you cause a brawl?"*

"I told you about the cake, right? Turns out my intuition was right," Ilea sent. Then again she supposed it was sugar, egg, and flour. Any organism that used calories to function would likely enjoy such a meal. *Like giving watermelon to turtles.*

She assumed the foxes wouldn't have any negative side effects either, mostly due to their generally high level. And even if they did, a bit of poison resistance wouldn't hurt. She checked them with her healing but found the foxes weren't damaged. Ilea assumed if a threat arrived, they'd be back up and fighting in mere seconds. Though she supposed they wanted to savor the newfound experience.

"Blessed be Popi and Ilea," someone sent, others chiming in.

"I see you've made another impression. You really do have a talent for that," Octavia said. *"I tried to talk to a few of the Mava that I know but maneuvering the conversation to a serious topic is as difficult as it's always been."*

"You got me here, that's the point," Ilea sent. *"I like them."*

"I'm glad you do. I believe my time might be better spent using my divination magic to find Ascended facilities. I don't doubt anymore that you were the one to bring the Accords together, which means the Mava won't stand a chance against your cunning," Octavia sent.

Ilea raised her brows. *"Cunning?"*

"Your act is impressive. But I know your motives in this case. Brilliant really, to offer gifts without asking anything in return," Octavia sent, nodding to herself and giving Ilea a knowing smile.

What is she talking about?

“Don’t worry about it. But yeah, if you want to go help the others, I can send you back,” Ilea said.

“I will do my best to help in this endeavor, Lilith,” Octavia said and lowered her head. *“May we stop the Architect. And remember, the deep.”*

“Yes, sure,” Ilea said and opened a gate to the domain of the Meadow.

Octavia looked at her one last time before she stepped through, the gate closing right after.

The deep? The Architect? Political maneuvers? I was just having a good time. She sighed.

“What is it that troubles you, child?” a voice came to her mind. One she hadn’t heard before.

Ilea turned to a boulder like stone, vaguely out of place with all the more geometrical shapes. The closer she looked, the more angles she could see however, the large thing more an imitation of nature than natural itself. Atop it lounged a large silver fox with silver eyes, though it looked more like a wolf as far as she was concerned. Perhaps it was just the size. Nine grayish silvery tails were resting at its back.

[Silver Mage – lvl ???]

She found the fox at just above level eight hundred.

Ilea smiled. *“Finally.”*

He narrowed his eyes. *“What is it you seek?”*

“Silver Magic Resistance,” Ilea answered with a smirk. *“I’ll tell you a secret, mr foxwolf.”*

“And what would that be?” he asked, voice almost growling, ears perking up.

“I’ve got more cake,” she whispered. Perhaps she had no intention to leverage the sugary goods for political gains, but for resistances? For resistances she would feed them her own limbs. Granted they’d regrow.

“You’re aware that I cannot grant you resistance to my magic without inflicting a lot of pain,” the fox spoke.

Ilea rolled her eyes, crossing her arms in front of her. *“You really think I don’t know that?”*

He considered. *“You are the Immortal after all. Apologies for my assumptions. Very well. Per level of resistance, you will provide one of your so called, cakes.”*

“One every five levels. It’s only at six in the first tier,” Ilea sent.

“Devious humans,” he sent with a growl. *“Very well. When do we start?”*

“Later?” she sent, stretching before she walked over to one of the well crafted fireplaces. Runes were etched into the ground, embers above still glowing to keep the snake meat warm. Her ash lashed out to cut off a chunk, a hovering ash disk bringing the food towards her.

“Later suits me. Did you not bring your cake just for this?”

“I have reasons to be here, but resistance training wasn’t really one of them. Not until I saw your silver magic, but I suppose there are some others here that could provide a few levels. Not that anyone is as powerful as you,” she sent.

“You are the one they call Ilea, are you not? The one wielding the Fires of Creation, a human. Few of your kind travel past the Elven Domains and so far west,” the fox spoke.

Ilea bit into the meat. The herbs were nice but she had to admit that Keyla had better seasonings available to her. Still, it felt right, in the desert, surrounded by magical foxes. She almost felt like she was taking part in some kind of summer camp. *Might want to do that now.* She reset the gate location she had near the Still Valley to the tower of the Mava. For now it seemed more important. There were Taleen gates near the domains anyway.

“I am. Who are you?” she asked in turn, teleporting up and sitting down on a comfortable arch near the ceiling of this layer.

“I am Ohn Ika,” he sent.

“I think you were mentioned. You’re an important figure?” she asked.

He smiled. *“You are refreshing. The few that travel to these deserts from other species often think me the leader of this Skal. Or the one to talk to for trade or favors.”*

“Well, you are the highest level Mava I’ve seen,” Ilea said. *“I suppose it would make sense. Though I understand you don’t really have a fixed hierarchy.”*

“We do not.”

“But you do train silver magic for cakes. So maybe the others weren’t that wrong to address you.” She held a piece of snake meat towards his direction.

“None were smart enough to bring cake yet. Precious metals, magical trinkets, artifacts, books, though the latter I do enjoy,” he sent.

“Oh right! Speaking of artifacts. There’s something I found that might belong to you,” Ilea said, summoning one of the artifacts she had found in Ker Velor’s hidden treasury or trap room in Elos. The Heart of Verivyen. The black heart pulsed with magic, Ilea holding it in one hand while she ate with the other.

Mava all around sprung up as if electrocuted, even Ohn Ika standing up instantly, a pulse of silver magic emanating from his form. *“The Heart,”* he sent, confusion and wonder in his voice.

“You know it then?” Ilea asked, storing it again. *“Tell me what it’s called and where you got it from.”*

“Why?” Ohn Ika asked, the Mava gathering up with her at the center, their eyes focusing and their magic coalescing.

Ilea wasn’t too worried. They were still talking after all. *“To verify it’s yours.”*

“To... verify...” Ohn Ika spoke slowly before his eyes opened wide. *“You expect deceit, yes.”* He started laughing, the sound a little high pitched from his snout. *“We are not human, Ilea. We do not claim to own what is not ours. The Heart of Verivyen was a gift to our kind from the Spirits of Old. The story goes that a lost Fae was found amidst the desert sands. Injured and unable to move, hunted by beasts. Re Ya, an ancient Mava, found the Fae and protected it, bringing it to her Skal where the being was nursed back to health.”*

“In her travels she encountered two more Spirits of Old. Though not in such a perilous state, they required her aid nonetheless, and she gave it, without asking anything in return. One year after her last rescue, Re Ya was visited by one of the Spirits, and given the Heart of Verivyen, the Oasis of the

Sava desert. It was burned and thought destroyed, millennia past. Yet you show it here... an illusion perhaps?"

"Sounds like something the Fae would do," Ilea sent and summoned the Heart again. "I don't know if it's the real thing as I have never seen it. I found it in the facility of an Ascended called the Architect. I took it and was brought to Kohr, their realm. He tried to kill me there but I escaped. A faen friend told me something about cute brown tails."

"Re Ya's fur is said to be brown. Though I cannot comment on her being cute, as we have never met," Ohn Ika said.

"Well if she's around, you can give it back to her, otherwise I suppose it belongs to the Mava either way," Ilea said and used her space manipulation to slowly move the artifact towards the large silver fox.

Dozens of bright eyes watched the floating heart in perfect silence, until the silver tails of Ohn Ika enveloped its pulsing form. *"It is whole. And true,"* he sent, all the foxes nearby rejoicing with both magic, laughter, and cheers. *"We shall protect it, and once more set it down into the sands."*

He turned to Ilea, as did many of the others. *"You are human. While you are similar to us, you say that you have come with a request. Say it now."*

"Ker Velor, the Architect, the one from whom I have taken the Heart, is said to return to Elos. We don't know why exactly, but one possibility is the taking of our remaining suns. You do remember what happened three thousand years ago?"

"The rupture of the three. We remember," Ohn Ika spoke. *"Humans and elves sought to fight the invaders, but we knew it had been too late, knew their unity was broken. Only death and chaos awaited in their realm. What they had taken, could not be returned. You claim they are back?"*

"I can get you in touch with one of my allies, to explain everything we know," she said.

"And what do you seek of the Mava?"

"We need to find any Ascended facilities that we can, and I'm sure your kind has powerful mages like yourself who could be helpful in that task. And we have to find Ker Velor himself. I suppose in part it's just meant as a warning as well. We don't know what would happen if more suns were to be taken. It has to be prevented," she sent.

"She speaks truth," a one eyed Mava spoke.

Another three confirmed.

"So you know of this already?" Ilea asked.

"They do not know. They gauged your words, to find deceit," Ohn Ika explained.

"She is marked by the Spirits of Old," another spoke.

"Ker Velor has taken the Heart. He must pay for such treachery," Ren Va exclaimed. Many voices joined his, howls and growls, followed by powerful surges of magic. *"Inform the other Skal, the gift that was lost, has been returned, and an enemy to all Mava will return."*

"Thank you, Ilea. For returning what was taken," Ohn Ika spoke. *"I shall meet with that ally of yours, to discuss our involvement."*

She raised her brows. *"That easy? I didn't expect you to care much."*

“You do not know the value this artifact holds to our kind. And the grief its supposed destruction has caused. That offense will not remain unpunished. It must not. You eat and share like our kind. You are friend of the Fae, and wielder of the white flame. No prophecy I know speaks of your name or of the Heart’s return, and yet here you are, claiming that the invaders will return. We. Shall answer them.”

“Badass,” Ilea sent, smiling at the massive silver fox, his size larger than even Catelyn’s extended fire form. *“There’s still snake meat left though, I hope you don’t instantly run off.”*

Ohn Ika grinned. *“It is no surprise that you are a friend of the Fae. Perhaps you carry their blood in your veins.”*

Ilea nearly spat out the meat she was chewing. Her mom, with a Fae? Preposterous. They weren’t even hippies.

“Maybe their magic, I do have a Class that benefited from my connection to their kind,” she sent to quickly dissuade any additional thoughts. *“My parents were human, I assure you. Neither of them of this realm even.”*

The fox’s eyes widened. *“A realm traveler. That may explain some of your demeanor.*

“Met many?” Ilea asked.

“None of them human, and I believed they have perished by now. Few were prepared for the harsh environments of Elos, that I am sure of.”

Ilea wondered what that meant. Other species? She did know Evan thought this realm quite nice compared to his previous home. After having seen Kohr, she was inclined to agree. Though it was far more dangerous than Earth, the existence of magic added an incredible way to deal with said dangers. She was lucky enough to appear in the Plains. If she had come to the North or the desert here, she would’ve been dead damn near instantly. And even with it being the Plains, the wildlife proved dangerous. Had she not stumbled upon the Azarinth temple by chance.

Lucky me. She considered the possibility of some Fae or other powerful creature putting her in the right spot to give her a chance, but with what she’d heard of other realm travelers, she had just been lucky. Had she appeared closer to Riverwatch or Virilya, she could’ve become an adventurer as well. Her initial Class would’ve never been as powerful but with how evolutions worked, she could’ve reached the same heights eventually. Though her healing and early teleportation certainly helped. A lot.

“Yeah. I was lucky,” she sent. *“The Plains are far less dangerous than most other places I’ve been on this continent.”*

“It has led you here in the end, and for that I’m grateful,” the silver fox spoke. *“Where must we travel to meet your allies?”*

“I set up a gate here, so I can move you between the two places. It’s far northeast of here, where arcane storms reign during the day, and mists pool by night. Do you wish to go there right now?” she asked.

“I don’t see why we should delay. Is there anything else I or one of us could do for you?” Ohn Ika asked.

“Resistance training maybe. I’m also looking for dangerous four marks to hunt, or dungeons that contain them,” she sent.

“That, we can look into. How do we contact you? Or will you remain here?”

“I can put marks on a few of you, once per hour we can sent a message to each other with up to twenty words. I know where you are at all times, if not subdued by magic, and I can teleport to you a few times per day. That’s just a suggestion, I know that requires a lot of trust-”

“Done. Set your mark on me, Ilea,” Ohn Ika spoke.

“And me!” Myr Iva added.

“Me as well,” Ren Va spoke. A few others offered as well.

“I think three is sufficient,” Ilea said, not about to add the entire Skal to her Huntress skill.

She moved between the creatures. Ren Va’s scales were warm to the touch, Myr Iva’s fur soft but quite hot. Ohn Ika’s fur felt more like metal bristles, but with her high resilience and body enhancements, she didn’t mind. Even petting him would likely not be an issue but she felt weird doing that to a massive sapient fox creature. Catelyn didn’t count. She was cute.

The marks set, she opened a gate to the domain of the Meadow. *“Those who wish to meet the Accords, follow me. Oh, and as a warning, there are a lot of different species involved. The Elves are Cerithil Hunters, and we even have an Ascended working with us, so don’t attack anyone or you’ll be sent back.”*

“The Accords...” Ohn Iva murmured.

A few dozen Mava followed immediately, more of them considering until eventually the entirety of the present foxes moved towards the gate.

Of course they would. Ilea wondered if she should’ve limited her introduction to a few key members but then she supposed all of them were individual parts of the Skal.

“What about the Druned?” she asked, just before stepping through to the Meadow.

“The Druned will be the Druned. They are not the Mava,” Ren Va answered.

“Right,” Ilea said with a smile, taking a deep breath as she walked through to the current headquarters of the Accords. Around one day after leaving. *Maybe Octavia is right, and I’m just somehow really good at this.* She didn’t really mind, just glad to have met the Mava, and that she was able to convince them of the possible threat.