

## Chapter 773 Shift

Her fires were active anyway, so she slowly moved her arm to take the key, trying to spread the flames throughout the vicinity with her ash, hoping the Oracle would see her part of the bargain fulfilled. Her arm moved closer to the key and yet she found herself slowed down as she got near, more and more as the aura of the being became stronger. Ilea could find no wisps in the area, her strength unable to push through the strange phenomenon.

Her fires should've touched the Oracle by now, her arm only a few centimeters away from the strangely blurred hand, key held within. And yet the white flame seemed unable to touch its form. The pulses of ice magic had stopped by now.

*"Thou art not kin,"* the being spoke in a whisper, as if it had come to a conclusion.

Ilea felt the aura around its form strengthen, her arm going numb as the freezing magic spread into her. *If I can't get the key in this space, let's try something else.*

Primordial Shift activated, wisps moving as strange flesh like appendages writhed around her. Warmth spread through her as the fires of creation erupted, far more powerful than what she had summoned before. Her arm recovered instantly, Ilea watching from within the powerful spell as the Oracle stepped forward.

Floating shards of ice hovered around her body as the fires enveloped her. The being raised its arm and watched with entirely black eyes as her pale skin was covered by the fires. Ilea thought she could see wrinkles on the being's face, her features shifting. Long ears parted snow white hair. A smile. Her teeth were sharp.

Ilea found the expression both kind and terrifying, more so the latter because the Oracle could somehow step into the space her Primordial Shift had created. She had no idea how. What she realized however was that the frameworks had returned. The Oracle was graspable to her space awareness now, despite the fact that neither of them were truly part of the fabric in that moment. It meant as well that the Taleen Key was there for the taking. Ilea used her manipulation to gently lift the thing out of the being's hand, its pyramid like shape floating through the summoned magic before it vanished into her domain.

The Oracle reached out to her but found herself stopped by the magic protecting Ilea, shards of ice moving in a circle as her entire being was now burning. A pulse of magic erupted from the elf, fanning away some of the flames but not enough for her to continue. Her skin now reflected some of the light of the flames, ice forming on her body, removing the fires as her form returned back and away from the Primordial Shift.

Ilea deactivated the spell, the fires still burning in the vicinity as she looked at the Oracle. Once again she couldn't make out any details, the features she had grasped of the ancient elf gone and replaced by the being of magic. A part of her wondered if what she had seen had truly been reality, or perhaps some idea presented by the Oracle.

*"I thank thee, wielder of the fires. A most... peculiar demonstration of ancient power I shall not possess. Thou may not be of elven kind, though child of magic that you are,"* the whispers spoke.

Ilea remained where she was, the aura powerful but nothing she couldn't deal with. *"How did you step into my spell?"*

The Oracle remained unmoving. *“Thine ability... to wield and understand the cold is far away from reaching comprehension.”* The whisper was soft. Kind. That of a mother speaking to her child.

Ilea assumed her ice magic was just that impressive. The light explosion trap the Architect had prepared for her managed to pierce Primordial Shift as well, which meant a sufficient amount of magic could get through. Though this felt effortless, as if the Oracle moved past instead of blasting away the defenses. She was stopped in the end and pushed away, but Ilea didn't exactly understand her own ability well enough to propose an explanation. *Maybe I should start there instead of asking this Oracle for advice.* She smiled to herself at the thought.

*“You know of the Keys. Why do you not interfere? Why have you not sent the males to stop the Taleen?”* she asked.

*“The balance... of magic, is so very delicate, young friend of the Fae,”* the being spoke.

*That doesn't really answer the question,* Ilea thought, trying a different approach instead. *“Why do you let your young die? Why do you let those who want to help be seen as Cursed, hunted by other elves because they entered dungeons?”*

The being remained quiet for a time. *“Thine concern... for the living. It is... delicate. Though life is merely part of our journey all, as is death, rebirth, the end of all, and the beginning.”*

*“You're speaking in philosophic terms when real conscious beings are being killed for no reason,”* Ilea answered.

A pulse of magic flowed out, breaking through the golden shields and freezing half her body.

*“Do not, young healer, presume to judge our grief,”* the Oracle spoke, the whisper harsh, near hissing. *“All of Cerith is to be protected. New life flourishes, where old life withers and dies,”* it added, the whisper calm once more. *“Conflicts of the nature you wish to alter arise and vanish within time, yet change they bring, to all existence.”*

Ilea considered for a while, still close to the being and remaining within its domain. She wanted to talk to the ancient elf for as long as it was interested in her. She had broken out of the ice while the Oracle talked, her body healed already.

*“Why did you send out the males then? Three thousand years ago. Against the Ascended,”* Ilea spoke.

A hiss. Power emanated, so pure and terrifying, Ilea took a step back. An outburst only, not an attack aimed at her.

*“All of Cerith is to be protected. It is to be cherished, seen, felt, fought. Death as you presume is not the opposite of life, but it is part of it. Our realm was shaken, young Wanderer. The balance was shaken. Threatened. By the whims of children with tools they do not understand to wield,”* the Oracle spoke.

*Meaning they just don't see the Taleen as an issue at all. Or all the young elves that die. I'd call her a neglectful parent but with that outburst before it might not be the best idea. I did get what I came for.*

*“Can you help me train my ice resistance? Or my ice magic?”* she asked instead.

*“Thou hast ample opportunity within this domain. Gifts thou hast given, and gifts thou hast received. Now leave this frozen sea, for I have purpose,”* the being spoke.

*One way to tell me to fuck off, I guess.*

*“Thanks for the key. And the talk. Would you mind if I visited again sometime?”* she asked.

The Oracle did not respond.

*How very cold.* She immediately frowned at the accidental pun her own mind had conjured up.

*“I’ll fuck off then. Enjoy your purpose, old one,”* she sent and walked away, summoning her shield and ashen walls when a wave of ice magic slammed into her back. It felt like a slap, to punish an ill-mannered child. Problem was, Ilea had enough defenses to shrug it off. *Ancient generation parenting,* she thought and shook her head. *Wait, why do I even consider her a parent? Let alone mine?*

She glanced back but found both the oracle and all the floating shards gone, the same frozen sea in every direction. Ilea wriggled her fingers. *“Mysterious. Very impressive,”* she said and clapped her hands a few times. She looked around and tried to form a gate, the spell failing to manifest. *Hmm.*

*“Let’s try this then... can’t be bothered flying back through that battle hungry elf infested forest,”* she murmured to herself and cast her third tier of Transfer, focused on Ben. She couldn’t place his mark but it existed, that she knew.

The magic took longer to manifest, the runes etching itself into reality before the space magic took hold. Ilea felt herself being pulled through the fabric, at first slowly, then faster and faster. Finally, she appeared on a mountain near the Still Valley, and next to Ben.

*Freaky. As if the fabric itself couldn’t really grasp me.* She looked at her hand where a small bit of ice formed with her manipulation. *Might be worth working on in the future. Wielding that kind of power would be awesome. Plus I could go in there and maybe send a slap back. Considerations for the future.*

*“You returned!”* Ben exclaimed, his voice echoing through the vicinity.

*“Great. Well done,”* Ilea said and formed a gate, pulling him through with her before every elf in the Still Valley came to answer his call.

They appeared below Karth, her flames erupting once more to provide some light.

*“A... apologies, I...”* Ben spoke before he hissed in a joyous manner. *“I didn’t expect for you to return!”*

*“Thanks for all that trust,”* Ilea said and summoned the key she had gotten.

### ***[The Titanium Key – Ancient Quality]***

*Last one.*

*“You succeeded... most impressive,”* Ben spoke.

She made the thing vanish again. *“To be honest, one of my long range spells worked. So I assume there were others that escaped the Still Valley. Not that there’s too much to be found in the first place. The Sea of Truth was interesting... but ultimately just a frozen wasteland.”*

Ben opened his eyes wide. *“You... did you... you went to the Sea of Truth?”*

*“The Sea of Truth, yes. Who even chose that name? It’s stupid,”* she answered.

*“The... the Oracles of course. Was it hidden there, left behind? Encased in ice?”* he asked.

“No. One of the Oracles had it. She was... how should I describe it,” she said and tapped her lips.

Ben grabbed her arms with shaking hands. “You met one... you... you a human... met... I... where are we?” he spoke, looking at her before he glanced around. “Wait... you?” he said and focused back on her. The elf was sweating.

“It’s okay,” she said, pushing some healing magic into his mind. “Calm down, alright?” *She wasn’t even the weirdest thing I saw this month.*

“But... an Oracle. This is... unprecedented,” he murmured.

“You think?” Ilea asked. “Doubt no human has ever encountered an Oracle.”

Ben hissed. “Maybe. But none that I know. Tell me everything!”

Ilea sighed, but she couldn’t deny the excited elf. “Sure. While we’re digging.”

“Digging?” he asked.

She formed an ashen drill and aimed it down towards the ground. “The One without Form has made its move. It’s time we made ours.”

She told him of the Oracle while descending into the depths, off handedly looking through the notifications she still had pending in her mind.

***‘ding’ ‘Eternal Huntress [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 5’***

***‘ding’ ‘Eternal Sight [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 13’***

***‘ding’ ‘Origin of Ash and Embers [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 12’***

***‘ding’ ‘Authority of Ash and Ember [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 25’***

***‘ding’ ‘Vision of Ash [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 10’***

***‘ding’ ‘Primordial Shift [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 11’***

***‘ding’ ‘Primordial Shift [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 12’***

***‘ding’ ‘Fires of Creation [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 30’***

***‘ding’ ‘Reality Warp [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 6’***

***‘ding’ ‘Reality Warp [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 7’***

***‘ding’ ‘Primordial Flesh [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 20’***

***‘ding’ ‘Space Manipulation [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 24’***

***‘ding’ ‘Azarinth Barrier [Mythic] reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 11’***

...

***‘ding’ ‘Azarinth Barrier [Mythic] reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 14’***

***‘ding’ ‘Bulwark of Ash reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 15’***

***‘ding’ ‘Bulwark of Ash reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 16’***

***‘ding’ ‘Identify reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 5’***

***‘ding’ ‘Oxygen Repository reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 17’***

***‘ding’ ‘Telepathy reaches lvl 14’***

***‘ding’ ‘Ice Resistance reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 15’***

...

***‘ding’ ‘Ice Resistance reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 18’***

***‘ding’ ‘Soul Magic Resistance reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 10’***

***‘ding’ ‘One third tier General skill point awarded’***

***‘ding’ ‘You have conversed with an Elven Oracle – One Core skill point awarded’***

***‘ding’ ‘You have exchanged gifts with an Elven Oracle – One Core skill point awarded’***

*No point for getting figuratively smacked on the back of the head?* Ilea shook her head while she drilled into the Depths of Karth. The marks were back now, her position below the mountain suggesting she had quite a bit of ground to break through until they breached the underground cavern holding the dwarven capital.

*“Any more attacks in the past few hours?”* she sent to Trian.

*“Nothing. Cleanup is underway and the Accords work to reinforce Stormbreach and Riverwatch. Sentinels and Shadows stationed in each,”* the man answered a few seconds later.

*Sounds good. “Ben, we’ll have to collect the Elves soon. Can you go and prepare everyone?”*

*“I... I don’t know where we are, Ilea,”* the elf said.

*“Yes. Of course. I’ll teleport you, first to Niivalyr, then to the others. Sounds agreeable?”* she asked.

*“It... yes. I’m just wondering if you’re not rushing too much. We’ll have to prepare for an assault,”* he spoke.

Ilea sighed. *“People died today. Likely because I got close to collecting all the Taleen Keys. I’d like to avoid another engagement if at all possible. We have to push towards Iz so that the One without Form has no other choice but to answer on our terms.”*

He moved a hand through his hair and took in a deep breath. *“Very well. I will inform them of what has happened.”*

*“Taleen have attacked human cities. I will get everyone to below Karth in five hours. Pushing for Iz. Let me know if you are not ready,”* she sent to Neiphato and Niivalyr. *“I gave them a heads up,”* she said and reset her gate location to the deeper point, the tunnel angled in a way that wouldn’t allow a creature to simply fall down from above. She focused on Elfie’s mark and used her third tier transfer, bringing the ice elf with her.

“That was faster than expected,” Elfie commented, the group engaged with a group of Praetorians.

Ilea ignored the magic coming her way as she appeared. *Might be helpful if the One without Form somehow thinks I'm here.* She glanced at the green eyes of a Praetorian.

*“I'll get you as soon as I can. Finish your business here,”* she said.

*“Ilea,”* Elfie started, defending against a scythe coming his way.

Ilea summoned a golden shield to block the attack and sent a beam of Embered Heart through the shield and the metal behind, destroying the Praetorian instantly.

He glanced over but continued without much of a fuss. *“Isalthar will not want us there. Asay perhaps but the others... we are far too weak.”*

She smiled, hissing in a way that imitated the usual arrogance she had come to associate with elven kind since she had first met them. *“Really?”* she asked. *“I knew Fey and Neiphato had a high opinion of the Val Akuun. But are you really going to let that white haired wind mage stop you from participating in the battle for Iz?”*

He remained silent.

*“I remember you a lot more driven, Elfie. Like that one time you entered a dungeon against the rules of the Oracles. Fighting Praetorians at the side of a human. Or when you-”* she said.

*“Yes yes,”* he sent and hissed. *“Fine. I'll be there, Ilea. It's been... I've had a lot to think about in the past months. Perhaps I should've traveled with you instead.”*

*“You're far to noisy for that,”* she said.

He sighed and nodded slowly, a grin coming to his face. *“Let us stand together then. One last time.”*

*“Oh no, you'd be paste in two seconds if you fought right next to me. But you can support the others from a distance, maybe fight some of the Guardians on the ground,”* Ilea said and grinned back.

*“I remember now that I hate you,”* Elfie sent, the others having finished the few Praetorians with the help of Ben.

*“Good motivation to train then. I found some interesting things to fight in Kohr. Whenever you're ready to face four marks,”* she sent and gave him a thumbs up.

*“You incomprehensible... being,”* he said with a sigh.

*“I'll get you soon. Be ready,”* Ilea said and gave him a genuine smile. *“And as poetic as that sounded, don't get killed down there. We'll have plenty more opportunities to fight alongside each other.”* She waved to the others and stepped through her gate, back to drilling.

Ilea worked as fast as she could, contacting the next one on her list.

*“You probably heard about the attacks. I'm drilling towards Iz,”* she sent to Kyrian.

*“I'll get to Riverwatch. Open a gate when you're ready,”* he sent back.

*Been a while since I've seen him.* She knew he had reached his next evolution, just like Fey had a few months prior but she had yet to see the actual changes. Fey himself she informed in turn, the elf somewhere in the north according to her mark.

She stopped the drill a few hours later, the fires dying down in the darkness. Ilea reset her gate location and teleported to her house. A short flight out onto the ocean later, she dumped the rubble she had moved into her domain. *Lilith tunneling service. I should charge someone for this.*

Ilea followed up with a flight to Ravenhall, informing Claire about the happenings before she made a short stop at the Sentinel Headquarters. For once she had to decline the torture seeking battle healers, soon ready to move on as she stepped through a gate and into the domain of the Meadow.

*“I heard about the attacks. The last key?”* the being asked.

*“I got it. And saw some interesting magic in the process. We can discuss that later. Is Iana around?”* she asked and was moved into the soul forge. *Let’s get this over with.*