

## Chapter 552 Tourist Guide

*“So that is one of your towns?” Meadow asked.*

Ilea nodded. *“I haven’t actually been here before. It’s not that large compared to some of the places I’ve visited.”*

*“It’s quite impressive. The buildings that is... the walls are... not enchanted?” it asked.*

*“Probably not, no. Most creatures aren’t quite as high level as that Werewolf. And even that one might not approach the lights and noise of a town,” she said.*

*“Fascinating... truly,” Meadow said.*

*“Do you want to go in? Look around?” Ilea asked.*

*“Is that not too much of a risk? What if we’re discovered? There are powerful humans out there. They may not be as amicable if they find out you are carrying a four mark being,” Meadow said. “Also know that I won’t expand here. My mana would kill most of the humans in my vicinity.”*

*“Would be exceedingly unlucky to get discovered here, let alone by someone who could actually oppose me,” Ilea said and walked towards the town walls.*

They were somewhere in Lys. Probably.

She decided it was safer to just enter, blinking and displacing herself before they both appeared on a dirt road.

A single drunk man in shoddy pants and without a shirt on yelped.

*“Greetings,” Ilea said.*

He gulped. *“Ah... greetinsh, my lady.”*

*Manners at least, she thought and flung a piece of silver towards him.*

*“You didn’t lie... this man is level eighteen. How did he survive so long? He looks at least a decade old!” Meadow said.*

*“He’s at least thirty years old actually. The walls are your answer. Walls and lack of predators in the area I suppose. He wouldn’t go out into the wild without protection or in a large group,” Ilea said. “Many of the monsters around aren’t far above him in level by the way. It’s not just us humans.”*

*“I didn’t mean to insult you. I hope you understand. It’s just that... I haven’t seen something quite like this,” Meadow said.*

Ilea chuckled. *“Don’t you worry. I’m quite aware of my species’ limitations. And our potential.”*

*“Killing Astral spirits... when you started like that? You’re starting to look more and more impressive, Ilea,” Meadow said.*

*“Don’t flatter me. I’m happy to accept compliments once I’ve bested you in a bout,” she said and entered the local inn, putting Meadow into the pack she summoned.*

There were plenty of patrons around, her casual adventurer look not standing out quite as much as she had thought.

Ilea tried identifying the Meadow but failed, the spell unable to pierce the simple fabric.

*Good. Wouldn't want the Lily to find out quite this early.*

*"Is this... bread? And... some kind of meat? When did you last clean this thing?"* the creature asked.

*"I... haven't used it in a while. Shouldn't be too bad. Stored items don't spoil, right?"* she asked.

*"Hmm. Yes. I suppose it could be worse. But a mundane pack instead of spacial storage?"* Meadow said.

Ilea ordered two mugs of ale before sitting down near a corner of the room. Most of the large space was lit by oil lamps fastened to the wooden beams and walls.

Most of the patrons looked like farmers or simple townsfolk, two groups more the adventurer type. A single man played lazily on a lute, not singing at the moment.

*"There are so many people... what are they drinking?"* it asked.

*"Ale, whiskey, beer, gin, and a bunch of other beverages. Mostly of an alcoholic nature,"* she said.

*"Alcoholic?"* Meadow asked.

*"It's poisonous to humans. Dulls our senses. Makes you feel warm and fuzzy, or sad and terrible, maybe angry and bold. Depends on who you are, how much you drink, and how you're doing,"* she said.

*"Why do they do that?"* Meadow asked.

*"To have fun. To celebrate. Maybe to forget. Could be they're addicted, or it's just the only thing they have that brings a resemblance of joy. I like the taste mostly. But the alcohol itself isn't working on me anymore,"* Ilea explained.

*"Fascinating. So many facets and possibilities. Humans are very... cute,"* Meadow said.

*"Eh. Not sure if I share that opinion. I do think you're quite cute, to be honest,"* Ilea said and thanked the girl who brought her ale, taking a sip and sitting back. She casually rested an arm on the pack next to her.

*"I'm flattered. But I like Meadows,"* Meadow said.

*"You don't even have reproductive organs, do you?"* Ilea asked.

*"Way to be insensitive,"* Meadow said with a huff.

*"Sorry. Didn't mean to tread on you,"* Ilea said and patted the backpack.

*"I was kidding. Though I do appreciate the sentiment. Remember that I'm a millennia old being. I've had plenty of time to think about existence and my place in it,"* it said.

*"It's still okay to be insecure or hurt about things. Age alone doesn't change that,"* Ilea said and took another sip.

*"Excuse me, miss?"* a man clad in decrepit leather armor asked. He was armed with a simple shortsword.

“Hmm?” Ilea asked as she took another sip, glancing at the man.

“We been wonderin... a healer like yerself. Mayhaps you may be lookin for a group to do jobs with?” he asked, sweating by now.

Ilea saw the group of badly equipped adventurers at the table nearby, averting their eyes a little too obviously.

“What’s your name?” Ilea asked.

“Ah... Marry, miss,” he said.

“Sit down Marry. Why don’t you tell me about yourself and the last job you did with those four?” Ilea said.

He looked back at the group, sweating even more. “Ehm, miss. I didn’t mean no offense.”

Ilea looked up at him. “I wasn’t offended. I just asked about you and your last job. To get an idea about what kind of team you are. How would I make a decision to join you otherwise?”

“*Are you actually going to join them?*” Meadow asked, sounding intrigued and a little confused.

**[Warrior – lvl 29]**

The man looked young, eighteen maybe. His hairline was already declining. For a warrior his physique wasn’t too impressive but that could be misleading. His eyes were quite striking, a deep brown. Otherwise he wasn’t exactly blessed with beauty.

“*Probably not. Because I’m bringing you north. Otherwise. Maybe? They seem like they could use some pointers,*” Ilea said.

Marry gingerly sat down, nearly tripping on the chair.

He gulped.

“Well... me and the lads... and Ceril, well. We thought ta take up fightin ourselves... kill some pests and beasts. Hard ta find work round here otherwise. With the war an all,” he explained.

Ilea didn’t interrupt him, just drinking from her ale. She moved on to the second mug.

“Ah right... our last job. We were tasked to search a farm nearby. Boy had come runnin, talkin about monsters. Moles they were... massive ones with teeth this big,” he said and gestured with his hand. “Took us a few hours but we foun em all. Killed the buggers with steel and spells. Maul is good with fire.

“Two of us got injured. Hurt like a cun- like a... really bad. Had ta let it heal for a few days. Me leg hasn’t looked that bad ever... but now tis fine again,” he said and laughed awkwardly.

*Is this a local accent? How many different ones have I heard so far? I don’t remember anybody in Lys speaking like this. Hmm... well it’s not for me to question how people talk.*

She smiled and put down her mug. “That sounds like an adventure alright.”

He smiled too, the gesture sadly not helping his looks.

“Thanks miss. So whaddaya think? You been around ere long?” he asked.

“I’m just passing through, Marry. I do believe my missions are generally aimed at stronger opponents than moles though. I’m a Shadow after all,” Ilea said with a smile.

He made a surprised quipping noise, staring at her with confusion.

“Tell you what, why don’t you take these and bring them to a smith who can handle them. Maybe get some better weapons as soon as you have the funds to pay for them,” she said and summoned five Niameer steel ingots. Half of her supply.

He made another noise before he looked around nervously.

Most of the patrons hadn’t given them any attention. That didn’t change now.

“I can’t... miss, I can’t pay for that,” he said.

“It’s free. Take it as a gesture from one adventurer to another,” Ilea said. “Thanks for the offer.”

She put down a few copper coins for the ale and vanished to avoid another conversation. Meadow was displaced into her hand again, her pack stored once more.

“*You like a mysterious flair,*” Meadow said with a giggle.

“*I dislike extended conversations with people who think me some kind of monster, hero, or goddess,*” she said.

“*I feel you,*” Meadow said.

“*Where did you get That expression from?*” she asked.

“*A romance novel Michael provided. There were interesting uses of language in that one,*” it said.

“*Maybe an author that came from my realm,*” Ilea wondered, strolling through the town.

“*You just became the mysterious stranger to start their story. Funny,*” Meadow said.

“*Until they realize most smiths around here can’t handle those ingots. Or it gets stolen. Or their party falls apart because they can’t decide what to do with it,*” Ilea said.

“*I didn’t say a happy story,*” Meadow said. “*Though I suppose you are a little pessimistic.*”

“*Reality is often disappointing,*” Ilea said.

“*Why the deep voice?*” Meadow asked.

“*Don’t worry about it. Hey maybe you’re right and it actually jump starts their crew. Might hear from them in a decade or two,*” she said.

“*If you’re continuing like this, you’re not going to be alive to see that,*” Meadow said.

“*Now you’re the one being pessimistic,*” she said. “*I can heal pretty much anything.*”

“*Not overconfidence and death,*” Meadow said.

“*Not yet,*” Ilea corrected.

They both laughed, already reaching the other side of town.

“SHUT THE FUCK UP!” someone shouted from an open window.

*Apologies, wondrous dreamer.*

“*Everyone is asleep. Do you need that much of it?*” Meadow asked.

*“Mhm. It lessens as you level of course and depending on skills and Classes but yes. Humans do sleep a lot,”* she said, displacing both of them out of the town whose name she hadn't learned.

*“Thank you,”* Meadow said.

*“Hmm, for what?”* Ilea asked, spreading her wings before she lazily flew through fields. A few trees started to show by now, thin patches of forest visible in the distance.

*“For letting me see all this. I know you just want to go back to killing monsters,”* it said.

*“Just because that's all I did in Erendar, doesn't mean its representative of what I do. Well it kiiind of is but not fully. I do enjoy just exploring,”* Ilea said.

*“How did the ale taste?”* Meadow asked.

*“Not that good to be honest. The hygiene in the kitchen didn't impress me either to be honest. Maybe it was just the mugs,”* she said.

*“You didn't have to drink it, you know?”* Meadow said.

*“It fit with the whole atmosphere. Meadow, you yourself have reduced me to a bloodied and pierced through head. Some dirty mugs don't bother me,”* she said with a smile.

*“I suppose,”* Meadow said. *“I would've still complained.”*

*“Now I want to see that. Though I guess you'd make them burst with arcane energy just being in the same room,”* she said.

*“I'd have to request the manager of course,”* Meadow said.

Ilea laughed, speeding up a little now that she knew the Meadow had seen much of what could be deemed interesting in the surrounding areas.

Gyffold remained where it stood, undamaged from a quick aerial view.

*“Seems like it worked,”* Ilea said and descended to the shoreline. *“I'll quickly go check inside. Can I leave you here for a minute?”*

*“Please, mother! Don't leave me alone in the wilderness! I will be eaten by wolves!”* one of the most powerful creatures she had ever met said.

*“You have your mark. Call for help if critters start mangling you,”* Ilea said.

*“You heartless wench,”* Meadow said.

*“Says the tree. Literally no heart,”* she said.

*“How would you know. Never seen my innards, have you? Too weak for that,”* the creature said.

*“True, that I am,”* Ilea said and vanished.

She quickly entered the city, appearing in the gate room a moment later.

Only two guards had remained, playing cards on a chunk of rubble.

*“Attention!”* Ilea said, covered in her ashen armor.

The gate was gone, the surrounding space and mana returned to its normal state.

*No residue, nothing.*

She wondered how the city would look if they had closed it from this side instead.

*Floating rubble.*

The guards scrambled up and saluted, their heartbeats nearly exploding.

“I was kidding. I have no authority to command you,” Ilea said and displaced the fallen cards back onto the chunk of stone. “Enjoy your game.”

She vanished again and joined the Meadow.

“*What’s that?*” Ilea asked, looking at the fox scrambling away at her appearance.

“*We will not talk of this,*” the Meadow said.

It smelled slightly sour.

*Did it? Damn. Well if that isn’t an achievement for some insane evolution down that fox’s life.*

She displaced the ball of stone into the lake, retrieving it a few seconds later.

“*I nearly drowned,*” it said.

“*Sure you did,*” Ilea nodded.

“*How did it look?*” Meadow asked.

“*Everything’s normal. Gate is closed and already half forgotten it seems,*” Ilea said. *As Velamyr intended.*

“*As I told you. No reason to question my grandeur,*” Meadow said.

“*Trust but verify,*” Ilea said.

“*I feel like that’s a contradiction,*” the creature said.

“*Human failure is always a possibility,*” she said and spread her wings once more. The third night had fallen since they had returned, dawn on the horizon.

“*I’m not human,*” the Meadow said.

“*Grassland failure is always a possibility,*” Ilea said.

“*Absolute certainty is likely impossible, so I suppose you’re not wrong,*” the creature said.

“*Heh,*” Ilea said, speeding through the lands by now.

“*I wish I could move like this,*” the Meadow said.

“*You’re a space mage. I’m sure you’ll figure something out. Couldn’t you form some kind of bird imitation with stone magic, make it live with life magic, and then teleport it around while you see through its eyes?*” Ilea asked.

“*There is so much to unpack here. I don’t even know where to begin explaining the difficulties of such a task without a related spell,*” Meadow said.

“*You’re the ancient super mage. Figure it out.*” Ilea said.

*“I’ll give it a shot. I always believed remaining at one positing wouldn’t be detrimental to my abilities but now... well this realm is quite different. Much more diverse. There are so many creatures here I will never reach,”* it said.

*“Sounds like an idea. Mind if we speed up a little until we’re in the north?”* Ilea asked.

*“I don’t mind, no,”* Meadow said.

*“That’s a change,”* Meadow said when they had crossed the Naraza mountain range.

*“Yeah. It’s only going to increase from here,”* Ilea said.

*“It’s such an extreme change,”* the Meadow said.

*“You sound contemplative. What is it?”* Ilea asked.

*“I suppose I don’t know enough about this realm yet. It just doesn’t seem like a natural occurrence to me,”* the Meadow said.

*“I see. Well people have meddled plenty. One sun is even missing,”* she said.

*“That’s true,”* Meadow said.

*“How is your defense looking by the way? See those storms?”* Ilea said.

*“Unstable arcane energies won’t be a problem for me, even in this form. Do not worry,”* Meadow said.

*“Good. Then we can fly during the day too,”* Ilea said and charged her wings. *“There’s little on the way that you won’t be able to see from Tremor or Hallowfort either. On the surface that is.”*

*“That sounds agreeable then,”* Meadow said.

Ilea smiled and shot off into the distance, vibrations and shock waves from the closest arcane storms brushing past her.

*Can spend my stats while we’re at it,* she thought.

Ilea went with fifty points into Vitality and Wisdom each.

*When am I getting a ten times boost to either of those?* she wondered.

The Meadow pointed out a few things as they were flying but it seemed even the four mark had trouble perceiving everything at the high speed while in its subdued form.

*“Alright, here we are,”* Ilea said and slowed down, arcane lightning striking her directly.

The energy flowed through her with a bright purple spark. It left one of her eyes injured, some of her organs slightly singed.

*“Alright there?”* she asked the slightly smoking ball of stone.

*“Quite some power in those storms,”* it admitted. *“You really need a third tier resistance for that.”*

“It helps, yeah,” she said and displaced them through the stone and into Tremor.

They landed in the ancient cathedral, Ilea placing the creature on a random chair.

“What do you think of the Mana density?” she asked. “Could you stay here?”

*“It’s much, much better than your house. Not just the interior design, from a mana standpoint too,”* it said. *“I could stay here, yes. It’s not ideal but acceptable. My presence would increase the density a hundred fold however.”*

“That makes sense. How much more would be acceptable? Same as in Erendar?” Ilea asked.

*“That much is not necessary, no. My abilities allow me to be a little more flexible. Specifically my life magic abilities,”* Meadow said.

“Hmm, alright. I don’t know if Hallowfort is any denser than this but maybe you can stay in the Descent. Not like the Ascended could do much against something like you,” she said.

*“Wherever there are beings... and here there are already thousands. Are you aware of the species living within this cavern?”* it asked.

“Soul Rippers, yes. They’re from another realm too apparently, summoned here by someone or something,” she said.

*“They are very peculiar. Devoid of... a mind. I may be wrong,”* it said.

“Maybe they were part of a hive mind before? Something that controlled them wherever they’re from?” Ilea asked.

*“A hive mind? Do you mean a shared consciousness or a controlling entity?”* Meadow said.

“Either could work. Though the latter makes more sense if you say they’re devoid of a mind. They still move around and attack if you get too close,” she said.

*“They are not moving,”* Meadow said.