

Chapter 765 Golden Eyes

Ilea walked back to the others. “We are working to get to the capital, but it will take more time, and we have to be prepared. There are four mark guardians protecting the core. And an entire army controlled by the One without Form.”

“We have fought Taleen armies long before you have heard of their existence,” Veratin said, the elf hissing at her.

“Good. That’s good,” Ilea said and gave him a thumbs up, the visible confusion on his face bringing her more than a bit of joy. “So none of you have an easy way to get the key in the ice domain?”

The Elves remained silent.

“You should leave the keys with someone else before you go,” Maratas said.

“I will,” Ilea said. She didn’t plan to die but she understood his concern. If a level eight hundred elf wouldn’t offer to invade the Still Valley, maybe Ben’s fears weren’t quite unfounded. Not that she assumed as much in the first place. “And I’ll let you know once I have all the keys.”

“Once you do, we will be ready,” Isalthar said. “And we will move to delve into Karth ourselves.”

“I can just teleport you there,” Ilea said.

He raised his brows before he bowed lightly. “That would indeed save time.”

The gray haired elf chuckled to himself.

“I wanted to ask something else. Fey didn’t know about it. Nelras Ithom, do you know the name?” she asked, looking around.

The chuckling elf choked before he started coughing.

Isalthar hissed. “A monarch. Of the sunlight wastes. He lived before my time but I know their domain fell into centuries of chaos after his demise. Hundreds of Elves lost their lives in the wake of his death. How have you heard of his name?”

“Stumbled upon an artifact that had to do with him,” she said.

“May I see it?” the gray haired elf said.

Ilea glanced his way. “No.”

He hissed, hand closing into a fist. “Very well,” he said and leaned back, his interest gone already.

Guess if you’re that old you don’t hold onto things for very long. She watched him for a moment before returning her attention to the others. *Before even Isalthar’s time. Was anyone here even there in the war? I suppose they would’ve had little need to be Cerithil Hunters before the Taleen started to send out their machines. Their cities wouldn’t have been dungeons in the first place.*

“Secrets kept from Elves, by a human of all things,” Veratin mused.

Ilea was about to hiss when he continued.

"I like that," he said. "Yes. Perhaps you were right to bring them here," he said, glancing at Isalthar before he stepped back to his brooding spot in the moss covered ruin somewhere deep within the Navali forest.

"What was your name again, child?" the gray haired elf asked.

"Why don't you give me your name first, grandpa?" she replied.

Some of the elves hissed.

He just smirked, the expression a little disturbing with his obvious age but youthful face. "I am Carthaan Oris, at your service, young human."

"I'm Lilith, nice to meet you, Carthaan," she spoke with a smile. "Can't wait to fight you."

He laughed, a fit of coughs wracking through him a moment later. "It will be nice to fight by your side, Lilith."

"Long has it been since I have fought alongside an Azarinth Healer," his voice reverberated in her mind.

Ilea cut the connection before establishing a new one with her own skill. *"You're a funny one, old elf."*

He huffed.

"I'm not of the Azarinth however, even though I use their magic," she said.

"I'm not blind. Those lunatics are gone. Good riddance. Know that Nelras Ithom has fallen to the Ascended, brought into their realm like the idiot he was. He had a good heart, and who knows... perhaps he would've been by our side today, had he survived." he said.

"Did you know him personally?" Ilea asked.

"I fought him a few times. I think... who knows... time and memory, is fickle," he spoke, his eyes dimming for a moment before the strange blue depth returned. *"Those... shields you formed. Have you found that mythical item?"*

"The Azarinth Star," Ilea said. "Yes. I found it recently. What do you know of it?"

He nodded to himself. *"Bothersome. Very bothersome. It's good that you have it, and not one of their Elders."*

"Didn't you just say they're gone?" she asked.

"Gone?" he looked at her with confusion. "Yes..." He nodded to himself. *"The Azarinth? Your magic feels familiar, indeed."*

Isalthar gently touched her shoulder, giving her a look with his white eyes.

"What's with him?" she asked.

"He is old. Older than most, and his mind has taken... much. If it's agreeable, I would ask you to let him rest," he said.

Ilea nodded. *"Carthaan. Would you mind if I healed your mind?"*

He glanced up. *"An arcane healer. Long has it been. Indeed, I would not deny such an attempt."*

You can't anyway. Healing magic, hah. She focused on his mind and activated her spell, seeing relief in his eyes before he closed them.

Guess I'm a caretaker for old elves now.

Isalthar watched the scene before he gave her a nod. "Is there anything else you came to discuss?"

"Zoy, if you're looking for some human interaction, let me know. Or if you want to meet someone else besides Elves. I can bring you back again too," she sent to the woman.

Zoy turned her head towards Ilea and gave her a light nod.

Guess that's a maybe? She shrugged and turned back to Isalthar. "I'll just return for resistance training. With some others here too, if that works for you."

"Most of the messages have been sent, though some of us seek Hunters still. Those who are here will be of service to you, should you be able to convince them," he said.

"You can start then, if you're around for a little while," she said.

"Of course," Isalthar spoke. "Let us descend deeper, lest we alert the young ones who hunt in these forests."

"They can't enter anyway, no?" Ilea asked, spreading her wings to follow the wind mage and healer.

"They would not enter, however magic may still destroy this place from outside. We do no longer adhere to the rules of the Oracles, though there is sanctity in the Nar el Ceroth, the place of creation, or dungeons as you call them," he said as they descended.

"Sure," Ilea said with a smile, another location added to her training roster.

Days turned to weeks, another two months passing in a flash as Ilea prepared for her visit to the Still Valley. The Hunters gathered around Isalthar provided powerful magic for her resistance training, Ilea switching between locations to optimize her routine.

The light was dim, distant chatter and the sound of squeaky wagon wheels signaling the early morning hours in the capital of Lys. Ilea kissed the tired yellow eyed woman lying next to her.

A hand brushed against her hair. "Leaving again?" Felicia asked.

"You know the drill," Ilea said with a smile.

"How can you keep up with it all? I'm still tired from this week and I've worked half as much as you did," Felicia said. "When did you even sleep last?"

"I'll sleep when I've dealt with the keys. That ice valley is taunting me, I tell you," Ilea said, touching her lip. "As is Kohr to be honest."

"You've gotten so much stronger. I'm sure there's no horror out there capable of defeating you," Felicia said, grabbing Ilea's arm before she pulled her down. She moved close to her ear and continued in a whisper. "Except for me of course."

"Except for you," Ilea said and kissed her.

She left an hour later, behind on her schedule but more than ready for the day ahead.

“*The preparations are done,*” the Meadow sent into her mind just as she was about to cast her third tier transfer to join Ben for their early morning ice magic session.

“*Can’t make it right now, Ben. Might be there later. I’ll let you know,*” she sent to the elf. The enhancement to Eternal Huntress increased the message limit from ten to twenty words, in addition to the teleportation benefits.

“I’ll see you in a few days,” she said to the wind make with a smile, teleporting out of the estate and falling into an appearing gate. She landed on the other side, now within the domain of the Meadow.

“*Welcome,*” it spoke into her mind. “*The others are ready.*”

“*Let’s get started then,*” she sent and teleported past the enchanted buildings now crowding around the outer parts of the domain. Just far enough away for the mana not to be troublesome for the researchers and visitors. Most of the people the Meadow had mentioned were interested in magical theory and not the divinity or nature of its existence.

The Soul Forge had become some kind of refuge within the northern domain, though nobody besides Ilea and the Fae were allowed close to the crystal tree either. Her daily baths had become a staple however, and today the cube itself was locked, most of the enchantments previously set up by Khan Joggoth repaired by Iana and Christopher.

She knocked on the gates but transferred inside when she had figured out the daily puzzle set by the enchanters. They weren’t exactly on the level of the Meadow.

“Two seconds,” Iana said when she saw Ilea.

“It wasn’t bad today, seen a few similar ones before,” Ilea answered, looking at the few Sentinels present. They were mostly there to make sure nobody from outside broke in while they conducted their work.

Owl was there too, and they remained within the domain of the Meadow.

“The vessel is prepared,” Goliath spoke.

Ilea walked over to the device now standing where they had initially found it. A strange apparatus. She scratched her head. *Soul transfer technology. Freaky stuff.* She felt Violence settle on her shoulder. “*You’re here too?*”

Interesting

Magic

“*Sure,*” Ilea answered. “*Or are you hoping for a soul to be ripped apart right in front of you?*”

The being giggled, looking away in an oblivious manner.

In front of the machine stood a war machine, obviously based on the design of the Soul Wardens but quite a bit smaller, smaller even than Ilea. And it had no weapons. They did decide to make it otherwise similar to a humanoid being, working limbs and all. It seemed cruel to move the trapped soul from a sphere into essentially another object where it could be interrogated. Like this they could likely prevent the ancient soul from causing too much damage if it was overly hostile.

“*Get Fey in here too,*” she sent to the Meadow, the elf appearing a few seconds later.

The present Sentinels she trusted, all of them around for some time and above level two fifty. Claire and Trian suggested exposing a few trusted people at a time to a few of the Cerithil Hunters instead

of doing a big reveal to everyone of importance. Humans were still very much suspicious of the entire species, for well founded reasons.

Some of the Sentinels tensed up just a little, but all of them here had faced horrors at least as bad as the dragonling.

The elf spread his arms and hissed.

“Fuck off, Fey,” Ilea said, looking at the prepared war machine. Entirely black and made of niameer steel, its innards constructed by Bralin and Goliath with added enchantments from Iana and Chris. The soul vessel within its chest was the most difficult thing to construct, a team effort from everyone mentioned including the Meadow, Owl, and Twin, the Fae offering help with its experience of having two souls within its form.

“You’re destroying millennia of reputation by not taking me seriously,” the elf said and hissed.

One of the Sentinels chuckled.

Fey pointed at the woman. “I’ll eat you first.”

“Try me,” she said.

He hissed.

So did she.

They grow up so fast.

“You’re a bad influence. Elves more immature would take that as a grave insult. We can have a bout later and I’ll show you that such actions are a mistake,” Fey said.

“I hope those are not empty words,” the Sentinel spoke.

Ilea ignored them. “*Why didn’t Twin want to come?*”

“*Twin is certain of the success of the vessel,*” the Meadow spoke.

“*Yeah, but Violence is here. Think he tampered with it?*” she said and glanced at the being on her shoulder.

“*No. Though the complexity of the project coupled with our relative inexperience results in a certain risk. I believe it negligible, as do the others,*” the being sent.

“*Still kind of strange that it’s not here,*” Ilea said. “*Think it’s safe, Violence?*” she asked. “*With Twin not being here, I mean.*”

Twin

Busy

“*Busy?*” Ilea asked.

Flowers

Blooming

The Fae spoke the words whilst bobbing its head up and down, turning back to the war machine as if everything was explained.

“*Alright. Sure,*” Ilea said. “I think we can start then,” she added.

The sphere appeared near the machine, given to the Meadow for storage after its study and the subsequent construction of the new vessel.

Fey stepped next to her as everyone took their positions, various barriers appearing in the main hall of the Soul Forge.

“Resurrecting yet another ancient king,” Ilea murmured. “How many of them are out there.”

“You seem to keep finding them,” Fey answered.

A pulse of soul magic whipped out of the device, striking the perfectly placed black sphere before another beam struck the war machine. No major display of magical power, the process done in mere seconds.

Ilea didn’t know soul magic well but Owl assured her that the device was some of the most delicate appliance of essence manipulation. The lack of overwhelming power was required to prevent damage, which made the process even more difficult.

They all waited for a few seconds until glowing golden eyes flickered to life within the black helmet. The war machine looked at the gathered beings before raising its arms, looking down at them before making fists.

“He can hear us right?” Fey asked, his face revealed.

The war machine glanced up again, its eyes lingering on Fey, it then moved on to look at the Fae on Ilea’s shoulder, then Ilea, then Owl.

“Where-” It spoke with a deep mechanical voice, pausing in consideration before it took a step forward. “Where is. Ker Velor?”

The voice module was delicate, the vibrations suggesting various emotions.

Ilea took a step forward. “I’d like to know that too. For similar reasons probably.”

“Where is... this?” the being asked.

“The war has ended. Sometime over three thousand years ago. You’re in the north currently. I found a sphere that had your essence in it, stored in a vault that belonged to Ker Velor. Do you remember who you are?” Ilea said.

The being paused, taking another step forward before it looked at its metal hand. “Niameer... I am... Nelras Ithom. Monarch... no. This means I have died. I have lost the battle. It was dark... three thousand years you say.” His voice shook lightly before he staggered and went down to his knees with a heavy impact. He still looked at his hands. “What have... why.” He looked up to Ilea.

“You were stuck in this before,” Ilea said and moved the sphere to her hand, showing it off to him.

A hiss came from the war machine, the sound strangely distorted. “You should have destroyed it.”

“Very pessimistic. Do you not want to get revenge?” Ilea asked.

He chuckled. “With this?” he asked, a flicker of magic coming to life in his hand, the light vanishing a moment later. “My form was destroyed. This is... humiliating.”

“We apologize,” Iana said. “But we weren’t sure how you would react. To everything.”

“We didn’t now if you’d lose it immediately,” Ilea said. “Or on whose side you were on.”

“Side? Time has passed... if you speak the truth, healer, then my understanding of sides is outdated. And yet you know of Ker Velor. What reasons do you have to seek him?”

“He nearly killed me. Twice,” Ilea said. “What’s your reason?”

The machine slowly stood up, the movements careful. “The Ascended sought to take our light. And... it seems you are more difficult to kill than I was. Though if you too seek the destruction of Ker Velor, my current understanding is, that I’m on your side.”

“You don’t mind me being a human?” Ilea asked.

“You stand next to an elf. You are accompanied by a Fae. A being of death hovers in this hall. There are healers present, and I feel... a powerful presence,” Nelras spoke, looking towards the shut gates. “No Oracle would accept this form of mine, and I lack the strength to reclaim my title. If you have given me this... body, in order to destroy the Ascended, then I will do what I can to support you.”

“Sounds pretty good to me,” Ilea said and gave him a thumbs up, the fae mimicking the motion.

“You’re far to trusting,” Feyrair said. “A monarch... trapped within a level one hundred war machine.” He grinned and hissed.

Nelras glanced his way. “You are permitted your victory, young dragon touched warrior and wielder of the flame of creation. Though I am monarch no longer. Perhaps not elf at all. Yet my will remains, and I know secrets of our common enemy. What is your name, healer who has faced the Ascended?”

“I’m Ilea. It’s good to meet you, and I’m glad you didn’t lose it. Man, if I woke up in some low level war machine, I’d probably be pretty fucking pissed,” she said.

“I have wandered a haze like darkness, though my anger remains. This form is limiting, though once more am I back among the light. Tell me, do the sunlight wastes persist?”