

Chapter 804 Farewells

Ilea leaned against the high walls of Ravenhall. The suns wouldn't reach above the nearby mountains for another few hours but the horizon was starting to take on color. Kyrian stood nearby. There was little snow at this time of year, mostly limited to the peaks of the nearby mountains. The valleys farther south would have more due to the lack of sunlight and even higher altitude.

A few minutes passed until the first Sentinels joined them. Some coming from the gates outside the city. All wore their armor, the atmosphere solemn. Ilea soon saw the healers and paladins of the Corinth Order move along the wall to join them. Both Donnavon and Bryce were with them.

Claire arrived with two Executioners and a few members of the Accords. Ilea took in a deep breath when she saw a Sentinel team join their growing procession with Willa's parents.

"Where's Trian?" she sent to one of the Executioners.

"He is already there, preparing everything. Phoebe and Mila are there as well," the machine replied.

Ilea saw a few more people join, bringing them to nearly sixty. *"Quite a few faces I've not seen before."*

"Indeed. There was outreach from various parties. Condolences and requests to be present at the funeral," Aki informed her. *"Representatives from various factions and countries being present here implies diplomatic ties and options."*

"I don't like the idea of this funeral being politicized," Ilea said.

"Me neither. But a refusal would've led to more issues. You have no obligation to participate in these matters, and none of them will expect you to. Or anyone else that had a connection with Willa or Ember in a manner beyond political ties with the Sentinels or the Accords," Aki said. *"They are here to show their respect."*

"We will leave now. Everyone who cannot fly, please find a Sentinel to help you out," Aki said.

Differing wings sprouted from various backs, metal floating away from Kyrian as everyone prepared to leave.

Ilea flew up too, wearing her bone set once more to commemorate the Sentinels. One of the Executioners led the loose formation with a few groups of Sentinels. They flew for around ten minutes before landing near one of the mountain peaks south of Ravenhall. A plateau overlooking the surrounding valleys. Even the ocean was visible in the distance, the skies colored in a light red hue.

Two pyres had been prepared, the bodies laid onto them. Both were clad in their former armor, likely to prevent the visibility of Willa's injuries. Trian and two Hunter Praetorians were already present, including six Sentinels.

Ilea landed near the man, taking off her helmet as she stepped a little to the side. She was joined by Kyrian and a few higher level Sentinels a few moments later. Cool wind moved her hair and brushed against her cheeks, the altitude removing a few degrees from the temperature.

She watched the people land before she turned her head to see the distant ocean. The skies were clear.

Phoebe and Mila stood close to the pyres, soon joined by Briana and Andres.

“Thank you all for coming,” Trian spoke once the people were settled. “We’re near the summit of the Verian mountain, a place that most Sentinels visit in some of their exercises. Both Willa and Ember had made their first ascent to this plateau just a few months back. It was the place their remaining team had chosen for this funeral. Today we say our farewell to these healers and Sentinels of Ravenhall. Fallen in battle, they shall be remembered by those that remain and those that will come after them.”

The winds whipped at Ilea’s hair when she saw two torches being lit by two Sentinels.

“Willa of Kroll,” Trian spoke, the Sentinel setting fire to the wood.

“Ember of Dawntree,” he spoke as the second pyre was set alight.

The fires moved in the wind, quickly moving over the wood, fighting against the cold air.

Trian waited until the fires had spread to the entire pyres. He raised his arm before a bolt of bright red lightning shot out.

A sphere of fire followed, ashen spears and arrows joining in.

Ilea watched the fires burn as she summoned her ash above. A torrent that moved in spirals towards the skies, set alight with white flame a moment later.

Curse magic flashed up and explosions thundered through the skies, the entire entourage adding their magic into the mix until the very air boiled and trembled.

Ilea looked up into the smoke and fire, colors flaring up time and time again. It reminded her of fireworks, though this was far more personal. It continued until the bodies were engulfed in fire, smoke rising from the pyres to join with the magic above.

May you fight on forever, if there is an afterlife.

The suns shined down onto the plateau by the time the pyres had mostly burnt away.

“Ilea, I assume,” a woman said, giving her a casual nod and a smile. “Sorry for your loss.”

“I’m not in the mood for talking,” Ilea said, looking at the bronze skinned and green eyed woman. Something about her was mesmerizing, though her open brown hair and face looked nondescript. She wore a brown poncho with yellow lines stitched into it, the fabric almost flowing in the wind. Black leather pants and thick boots finished the picture, a slight smile on her face with her head tilted slightly to the side as she took in Ilea.

[Wood Mage – lvl 672]

Ilea did a double take then locked eyes with the woman. “Who are you?”

“Just someone paying their respects,” the woman said and stepped next to Ilea.

She noticed Kyrian didn’t give her much attention.

“What can you gauge from the woman next to me?” Ilea asked him.

Kyrian glanced over. *“Level two forty wood mage. Do you know her?”*

“No,” Ilea sent back before she initiated telepathy with the woman. “Whoever you are, I hope you don’t plan to interrupt this procession.”

“So full of passion. You must be as young as Helena assumes,” the woman said, glancing at her for a moment, the same casual smile remaining on her face. “The Assassin leader and Lily member in question asked me to do something about your Accords ripping apart the sanctity of human civilization.” She rolled her eyes.

“You’re part of the Lily then?” Ilea asked.

“I’m part of many things, places, organizations. Just like you are. Medic Sentinels, Accords, what else was there? Shadow too I think, was it?” the woman said. “So, do your Accords plan to destroy the entirety of the Plains?”

Ilea shook her head in confusion. *“Of course not. We’ve brought teleportation gates to humanity and now we can help build and expand settlements with the help of the Taleen machinery.”*

“Ah, all that was you. Very proactive. Fun how you cracked all these secrets when he failed at that. Though I suppose it’s irrelevant now,” the woman said. “So it’s just Helena unable to deal with all the dwarves, Dark Ones, and probably other species you brought into the Plains?”

“How am I supposed to know what she thinks?” Ilea asked. “I just had tea with her a few times.”

The woman smiled, broader now. She looked to the sky. *“Her poison cake is magnificent. I wish she would work on that more instead of worrying about power and influence all the time.”*

“The poison cake is good, I agree. But again, who are you and why are you here?” Ilea asked.

“So stressed. You lost two people. It hurts, but you’ll get used to it, darling. Either that or you’ll be the one dying. The world keeps on spinning. Helena asked me to intervene. She knows I’m busy, so I thought this was important. Turns out she’s just having a crisis of some kind. I did think forming the Lily so focused on humanity could lead to issues. But oh well, we do need all the help we can get, wouldn’t you say?” the woman said.

“I have a lot of questions,” Ilea said. “But yes, compared to most of the species I’ve met, we have a bit of a difficult start.”

“But so much potential,” the woman said and scratched her chin. “Ilea, darling, I’m afraid you’ll have to forget those questions. I’m retired.”

“You’re retired?” Ilea asked.

“Yes. Which means that I am retired,” the woman said. “You don’t seem like a threat at all, nor do your Accords. I don’t dislike the general ideas you outlined, though I suppose it’s just so very... productive. I do like the Endless Meadow. Quite an interesting conversationalist you brought to our lands. And so very terrifyingly handsome. Even at a distance.”

“The Meadow never mentioned you,” Ilea said.

“The Meadow doesn’t know me like this. It is loyal to you,” the woman said and tapped Ilea’s arm. “And even now I’d be annoyed if you shared my existence with everyone around. I worked hard to have everyone forget about me. I’d like to keep it that way.”

“You expect me to just go on and forget about you after you showed up here, out of nowhere? I’m pretty resistant to mind magic,” Ilea said.

“Oh no, not at all. I know of your battle prowess. I’ve heard some of the songs. Few are well made. One or two maybe. The child, what was her name... Cless. Her paintings are quite impressive for her age. Some otherworldly inspiration I imagine. No Ilea, I expect you to not mention me because if I’m suddenly bothered by agents of the Accords or other annoying organizations thinking me a piece on whatever game is fancied in those circles these days, some more Sentinels might die. Or other people that you care about. This is a threat, yes. You don’t need to ask. And no, please keep whatever you have to say to yourself, I’ve heard it all a dozen times before. I’m not looking for a fight, I’m not looking to use you, and I’m not looking to start a pissing contest. I came to check because Helena asked me to. I deem you and your organization a boon to humanity and will leave you alone if what you said turns out to be the truth. That is all, really,” she said. *“You’re an easy one to gauge.”*

“That’s a lot,” Ilea said before she sighed. *“Maybe I should retire too.”*

The woman looked at her and laughed, attracting some attention for the out of place sound. She didn’t seem to care. *“You’re refreshing. Got yourself entwined with some busybodies, I see.”*

“No. I’m just a little tired of the constant conflicts. I do think the Accords are doing a lot of good,” Ilea said. *“And I’m proud to be part of it all. Not a fan of your threats, by the way.”*

The woman waved her off. *“You’ll understand when you get to my age. Though you strike me more as a bright burning star than my slow burning embers. Just don’t come hunting for me. I really just want to enjoy nature and what people create.”* She paused and considered. *“A word of advice. The conflicts don’t stop. Not ever. If you find yourself tied up, get out while you can. Or build a network you trust to handle things. Even now, you already have the Accords. You’re not exactly needed. Or so I would think. The man next to you is capable enough to deal with every court except maybe Lys’. And those silver machines look dangerous enough to handle most things. Maybe not a Monarch, but who knows.”*

“You know the Monarchs?” Ilea asked.

“Retired. Again. I talk to much. You remind me a little of myself, darling. But... you’re better. I hope it doesn’t end the same way as it often does,” she said.

“And how would that be?” Ilea said.

“Death of course. Or you leave for another realm because people are just an endless headache. I suppose you have a little more possibilities with these gates and machines,” she said. *“Say... the Meadow is loyal to you beyond the Accords?”*

“What do you mean?” Ilea asked.

“I’d like to visit in person, but only if it doesn’t immediately inform everyone of my presence, background, age, and magical prowess,” the woman said. *“It’s the first being I’ve met in ages that can appreciate the true intricacies of leaves.”*

Ilea looked at her. She found the woman far too peculiar and laid back for her to be threatening. Even at the high level and with the literal threats she spoke. *“The intricacies of leaves? And yes, the Meadow is a good friend. I think I could ask for a favor, but I’d want something from you in return.”*

“Of course. We’re both human after all,” the woman said with a smile. “What is it you desire of me, great Lilith of Ravenhall.”

“I want to know who’s behind the deaths of Willa and Ember. I want to know who funded and who made the teleportation gates used by those slavers. And I want to know who you are,” Ilea said.

The woman considered. “Willa and Ember being those two Sentinels. Honestly, darling, this is the first time I hear about teleportation gates beyond those of the Accords. Kind of funny. Such a massive feat, and someone managed to copy that achievement in less than half a year. Humanity is capable of so much, if only they believe something to be possible, and put their entire energy towards it. I imagine you’ll have better luck asking Helena, or maybe Arthur. Didn’t he study the gates for a while?”

“Arthur Redleaf has been dead for quite some time,” Ilea said.

“He has?” the woman said then shrugged. “Not much lost. Perhaps something good will come of his corpse. A copper beech perhaps?”

“You’re kidding me, right?” Ilea asked.

“No, dear. I would not care if you or anybody else wiped out the entirety of Virilya with all its nobles, or any other capital. These matters are irrelevant to me. Don’t push me like Hector did, and we can continue to ignore each others’ existence. My name is Maureen, and relevant to you... is perhaps only that I am one of the founders of the Golden Lily. Again, nobody knows that I’m at this level, not even Helena. Few know my name or even that I exist, and I would like to keep it that way. I could pull some strings to find out who is responsible for those gates but I imagine your own connections and the allies of the Accords will yield results far faster than my rusty network, half of it probably dead or dying.”

“You don’t care about war and destruction. You don’t care about threatening people with the death of their loved ones. You don’t care about progressing human kind, despite your surely absurd level of power and wealth,” Ilea said. “What can you offer me then? I don’t need someone to help me train wood magic resistance.”

“Way to call out an old woman,” Maureen said, though it didn’t sound or seem like she cared in the slightest. “I don’t know what I could offer.”

“A favor then,” Ilea said.

“A favor for a favor. That does sound fair. Very well. You let the Meadow know about me and that my existence has to stay secret, and I’ll give it information on how to contact me. One favor. It cannot mean my death.”

“Works for me. We can go there in a few hours. Just hang around,” Ilea said.

“Didn’t plan to leave, with the Golden Drake so close. Keyla is a wonderful cook. Perhaps even in the top ten within the Plains,” Maureen said.

Ilea ignored the obvious bait. She was not in the mood for any of this. Had she not identified Maureen, she wouldn’t have even engaged. Hard to ignore someone at that level of power. So far she met few humans above four hundred. One a reclusive librarian, one a space mage hiding in the north, and now a retiree who would murder to keep her existence hidden.

“I’ll leave you to your grieving then. Wonderful Flame of Creation by the way, that spiral was quite a touch,” Maureen said as she walked over to a group of adventurers, not a care in the world based on her bearing.

“Is she a concern?” Kyrian asked when the woman had left.

“No,” Ilea said. *“Just don’t engage or mention her to anyone. She’s willing to kill people to stay hidden.”*

“An assassin?” he asked.

“No. Just a retiree. She’s not a threat,” Ilea said. *I think.*

One of the Hunter Praetorians walked over to them and gave Ilea a nod.

Does he want to know about her too? Ilea wondered if she could keep the woman’s secret. It felt strange. Maureen’s casual behavior and nondescript presence hardly incurred a threatening air but at the same time she didn’t doubt the woman’s words. It hadn’t felt like an attack, more like an annoyed veteran that was constantly pestered by young ambitious idiots. *A bright star and not slow burning embers. I literally control embers, you old hag.*

“What is it?” Ilea sent to the Praetorian, not even knowing if the Hunters had the capability of communicating through telepathy.

Apparently they did. *“Ilea. Please don’t react to this in an obvious manner. In the last few hours we have received covert reports from Wayland, Alyris of Lys, Nero Skorn, and Emmanuel Eilhart that criminals, undercover operatives, and assassins have been hired for what seems like a coordinated effort to strike at settlements of the Accords. Without the number of reports and the prominent sources, we wouldn’t have classified this as a single strike. Additionally, detailed plans of the lesser teleportation gates have been sent to at least Lys.”*

“As a response to what we did in Nipha?” Ilea asked.

“The timing suggests as much. One of the targets is Dale Langston. Someone wants to hurt you. And the Accords,” Aki said.

Ilea ground her teeth.

“The attack is to happen tonight. We cannot mobilize any obvious response or the attackers will know and delay. Be ready. I’m informing trusted members of the Accords only, and I’m preparing a wide spread defensive response of Executioners and Hunter Praetorians throughout the Plains. Who else would be a target? Claire and Trian are obvious, though I doubt they could be taken out easily.”

“The Vultures. Keyla, any Sentinels, Shadows that I know, Iana and Chris, though they’re in the domain of the Meadow. How big do you think this thing is going to be?” Ilea asked.

“Difficult to say. But aiming to kill people with the goal of hurting you directly is both personal and emotional. Claire suggests this is a noble lashing out due to us finding and destroying their gates. Expect a turbulent night.”