

Chapter 541 Beatdown

Ilea tested her newfound abilities a little longer, making sure that various grapples or touching meadow still allowed her to blink or displace herself. Everything seemed to work fine.

Her third tier of Phaseshift wasn't unlimited either. Her third tier healing didn't recover her health instantly. Near that but not instantly. Her sacrifices could be stacked and increased due to the third tier's nature but there was a point where it simply wasn't efficient anymore due to how much mana her recovery cost and the gradually less meaningful returns.

Ilea covered the ground in ash, activating phaseshift and keeping it active for a few seconds, all the while using her full health sacrifice to fuel Flare of Creation.

The spell deactivated and she burst into flame. Ilea kept Flare of Creation's third tier active however, extending the flames to the ash already prepared.

By now the flames were bright and blazing, moving as Ilea moved the ash.

A few seconds passed and they dimmed noticeably. She stopped fueling it with additional health and watched the flames dim once more.

Double the power... for a while, she thought and smirked. *I need more health.*

It would only get more expensive the higher Flare of Creation leveled.

"A beautiful little flame," Meadow said.

"Don't mock me. I'm not a thousand years old. I'm sure I'll be able to fight you by that time," she said.

"Aw. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to make fun of your achievement. I meant what I said. You simply don't have the resources to form something I'd consider an actual flame," Meadow said and patted her back with some wood.

Still don't know if it's being sarcastic, Ilea thought. She really had taught the tree too well. Or was it just a coincidence? The Ice Elemental was much less snarky, that much was true. It was asleep again. By now she was glad the creature hadn't eaten her for waking her up previously.

Petting her was still an impossible task, its defenses still quite potent despite its state. Whenever it twitched or moved in its dreams, the being destroyed a part of the hall, quickly repaired by Meadow.

It was an impractical pet but Ilea still liked the idea.

Her and the Trakorov would make a wonderful pair. They could cuddle up. Maybe the heat and cold thing might be an issue. Or a benefit.

"She's just so cute, isn't she?" Ilea asked, looking at the absolutely massive wolf creature.

"She is," Meadow agreed. "I'm proud to have helped her achieve more sapience."

"Can she have children?" Ilea asked.

“I don’t think so. She lacks any reproductive organs though Elementals are a mystery to me anyway. Perhaps she can split somehow or form a smaller version of herself? Maybe one that you could pet?” Meadow suggested.

“Now you’re just teasing me,” Ilea said and touched the tree absentmindedly.

“About your gold magic resistance, you know I could just ask him,” Meadow said.

“I don’t want him to know how close we are. But I appreciate it. He’s going to owe me after all this is over anyway. If I don’t have it by then, that’s when he won’t be able to refuse,” she said.

“You’re too stubborn. You live to help others but refuse when help is presented to you,” Meadow said.

“I don’t refuse help. I’m just doing this to protect you,” Ilea said.

“Charming. But you forget that I’m an incomprehensible magic god. That human is nothing to me,” Meadow said.

“Don’t act so tough all the time, dear,” Ilea said. *“I know that deep down you’re just a warm ball of a thousand eyes.”*

“Don’t make me rip you apart again,” Meadow said.

“We could try you know, have an actual bout,” she said with a smile.

“No holding back? Ilea with all due respect, that wouldn’t be good for you,” Meadow said.

“I can’t feel pain and I can regenerate constantly. I’ll let you know once I reach the end of my resources. Or I can just teleport away,” she said.

“You forget that I’m a high level space magic practitioner. But if you really want it, perhaps you could put my mind at ease concerning your plan to stay here,” it said.

“You’re still worried? Really?” Ilea asked. *“I even have a third tier drain resistance. What kind of levels are we talking about with the Daughters? Higher than Wolfie here?”*

“No. Not those who would descend in two weeks. They’re probably between one and two thousand,” Meadow said.

“And they’re much worse at magic than you, right? So let’s try. Come at me with the intent to kill,” she said with a bright grin, spreading her wings as she flew back.

“I can’t truly think of killing you but I suppose if we’re testing your resilience, we may as well try. I’ll have to hold back to keep this place hidden but it should be enough,” Meadow said.

Finally, Ilea thought and activated all her buffs, except her health sacrificing ones.

“Then let me teach you a lesson, young human. First. I may be immobile but this, is my domain,” Meadow said, a powerful wave of mana pushing outwards.

Ilea watched on as a pale white barrier thrummed to life around the whole hall, bending around the Ice Elemental to exclude it entirely. It didn’t even wake up.

The mana waves that continuously flowed out from the center of the hall pushed her back physically, her wings working to counteract it. She felt herself tensing up, her ashen armor slightly shaved away with each pulse.

She felt an immense pressure that tried to hold her down. It was a familiar skill Meadow had used to keep her from moving. Ilea pushed against it, setting herself the goal of reaching the tree. Her wings flapped but she moved painfully slow.

She blinked but was pushed back by a barrier that formed where she had appeared. A front of solid rock formed around the tree when she was suddenly displaced back a few meters by one of Meadow's spells.

Ilea started using her teleportation spells whenever they weren't on cooldown, trying to get closer but always hitting solid stone, wood, or barriers that hadn't been there before. The solid wall continued to build around the tree.

Every time she teleported, the meadow pushed her back again, only split seconds allowing her to deliver some blows against the wall of defenses. Any damage she dealt had reformed already once she appeared again.

An arcane barrier formed around the defensive perimeter, growing thicker with each passing moment.

Her spells coupled with Flare of Creation burned into the dense barrier but despite her efforts, any weakness reformed faster than she could cause them. Meadow even had a way to put her flames out completely.

"Barrier magic is versatile. I merely use it to protect but its offensive potential is quite staggering," Meadow said in a booming voice, pushing against Ilea's ears and mind.

She saw hundreds of tiny barriers form around her, each thin as a razor and angled in a way to cut her.

Displacement worked on them but her efforts were countered partially. Even when it worked, she could only move less than a fourth.

The view her precognition provided wasn't promising.

Phaseshift was activated but the second it took to change the space of her body was too long.

She teleported but new barriers simply formed all around her, several hundred tiny magical blades cutting into her armor.

Her defenses resisted but were ultimately breached, her ashen armor cut deeply before her skin was reached. Phaseshift activated when blood started to show on dozens of cuts.

The barriers immediately moved through her, vanishing after they lost their purpose.

Ilea healed the damage, not that much thanks to her changed health calculation. Otherwise some of the cuts would have fucked up a few organs already, likely dealing more damage than a simple deep cut to her arms.

She started stacking her health sacrifice spells as a stone platform came into existence below her. Complex runes instantly formed, forcing her to teleport away.

The platform appeared right where she did, the runes coming to life just as two massive barriers formed in front and behind her.

They closed in, Ilea finding herself unable to teleport. Both of her abilities were stopped by whatever runic field Meadow had created.

Motherfucker.

The barriers stopped moving a few centimeters away from her phased body.

Ilea was sure she'd be paste once her body returned to its physical form.

"Will you survive it if I squash you?" Meadow asked in a normal tone.

"Have fun trying," Ilea said.

Her body returned to its physical form, Azarinth Awakening and Flare of Creation exploding in power and intensity, the white flames instantly igniting the thick barriers.

Ilea felt the pressure build as the barriers started to squash her, the power of her spells not enough to breach the thick constructs, nor enough to teleport out of the magic field below.

Her body groaned, blood cells exploding under the pressure. Her eyes popped as all the air was pushed out of her lungs. She felt her organs tremble, her whole form slowly flattened between the two barriers.

Wooden tendrils appeared next to her and started digging into her body. When they reached a certain depth, they ripped whole chunks out, ignoring the durability of her bones by simply cutting through the connecting tissue. Phaseshift was still on cooldown.

Reverse healing, Storm of Cinders, Heart of Cinder, Absolute Destruction, plain old ash, and all the strength she could muster pressed against the overwhelming power. All for nothing.

New barriers appeared where her arms would have reformed, preventing her healing from recovering the lost limbs.

Ilea activated her third tier Displacement, squeezing one end between her back and the barrier, the other outside of the hall itself. She used her ash to squeeze herself through but the wood and barriers kept her in place.

When she realized that the exit of her gateway was blocked by a barrier on the other side, she didn't know what to do anymore.

Meadow ripped her apart until only her head remained, barriers all around to physically prevent her from recovering the missing limbs and wood digging deep into her skull. Only her brain remained intact, left alone by the creature.

"Do I win?" Meadow asked.

"This is barely a scratch," Ilea said and activated phaseshift again.

"Do I really need to push you further? All you're doing is delaying the inevitable," Meadow said. *"I won't be using spells for you to absorb mana from. I'll just keep your brain from regenerating fully until you run out of either health or mana. Sounds lovely, doesn't it?"*

"Alright. Alright," Ilea said, annoyed and disappointed.

The barriers vanished, as did the rock and wood.

Ilea reformed with a pout, her armor covering her again quickly. She crossed her arms in front of her.

"Did I miss something?" she asked.

"You shouldn't have faced me in the first place," the Meadow said.

“Besides that. Your barriers even prevented me from destroying the stone plates that stopped my teleportation. How did that work anyway? It formed damn near instantly, you’re insane,” she said.

“Your offensive power is simply inconsequential to my creations. I admit that my knowledge of your skill set allowed me to pin you down quickly. Had I not known it, it may have taken me another five to six seconds. Enough for you to escape perhaps. Or enough to surprise me with either Phaseshift or your gate creation. It is unfortunate that I’m a master of space magic,” Meadow said.

“Very unfortunate indeed. If you couldn’t stop my teleportation, I could’ve escaped. Right?” she asked.

“Of course. But the fact remains that I did. Your resistances are high but the sheer energy a creature like me can use to stop you will simply be overwhelming. Had you created burning ash below the barriers to damage the delicate runes, you may have gained a split second to teleport away,” Meadow said.

“I admit that I underestimated you. Anything else I missed?” she asked.

The creature laughed, a sense of serenity returning with the fireflies that once again floated through the meadow. The sound of flowing water the only audible thing in the hall.

“Underestimated. Said a level four hundred to one above two thousand. The first wave of mana should have vaporized you,” Meadow said. *“The fact that you can even stand here without coughing up blood is impressive enough. Let alone demonstrating a real possibility of escaping the clutches of myself.”*

“One, I’m not at four hundred yet. Two, demonstrating a possibility isn’t exactly the same as actually accomplishing said feat,” Ilea said.

“Your power is entirely too high for an evolution at four hundred. But you should reach that conclusion soon enough,” Meadow said. *“Perhaps once you’ve gained more power, you would wish to try again. I do hope I didn’t traumatize you with this demonstration.”*

Ilea smiled. *“Oh no. Not at all. If anything, this proved that there’s a chance.”*

A sigh went through the hall. *“A chance of what?”*

“Me winning this fight,” Ilea said.

“You’re delusional,” the Meadow said.

Ilea shrugged. *“Again?”*

She spent the next few hours trying the same thing but as she adapted, so did the Meadow.

When she started to focus entirely on the anti teleportation runes, the Meadow simply covered the entire hall. When she focused fully on defense and healing, the Meadow still overwhelmed her in time. It felt like playing chess with nothing but pawns against an ancient grandmaster.

While her defensive and evasive measures failed, her offensive ones did so spectacularly. Nothing got through the monster’s defense even remotely. It even reformed the tiny cracks and scratches on the stone and wood it created. Not that it really had to.

After hundreds of attempts, she had managed to escape exactly zero times. If anything, she was getting worse.

Am I teaching this creature how to defeat me?

It didn't matter. Meadow could have finished her a thousand times over by now. Wood harder than her ash could bore into her immobilized skull without issue.

The creature did compliment her bones but proved even them to be useless against its creations.

Despite her insistence, the Meadow refused to destroy her brain even once. If anything it felt like a slap in the face to her. Like a parent not taking off the training wheels despite the child's insistence.

"I think this is as far as I'll get," she admitted finally.

"Your attempts did get better," Meadow said.

"You're not helping," she said. *"I'm going to hunt a spirit now."*

"Do greet them from me," the Meadow said, a spacial breeze flowing through the area.

Ilea looked at the sleeping wolf and to the tree, unsure which one would be more terrifying to face. From the wolf at least, she might be able to escape.

Probably has a way to freeze space itself, and me within, she thought and left the hall.

I really should have started testing these new abilities with the Astrals. Now my spirit is broken and my day is ruined.

Ilea decided it was time to break other spirits to reform her own.

First, she needed a target.

She flew out into the cold, now actually much warmer than Meadow's hall.

Her charged wings brought her into a nearby desert quickly, one use of Monster Hunter enough to wake up some monsters.

[Spirit of Death – lvl 459]

It looked a little like a scorpion but most of its form was melted and distorted, oozing with black slime.

Ripley would have a field day in Erendar.

The creature slammed its death magic enhanced stinger into her chest, the thing scratching past her ashen armor before it dug into the ground.

Flare of Creation activated as a mist of ash descended onto the creature. All of it ignited with the pale flame, reversed healing coupled with the fires quickly destroying the being both from within and without.

Five more creatures had appeared in the meantime, hundreds more running, flying, or slithering towards her location.

Three of them jumped her, Ilea nearly buckling under the weight. She managed to stabilize herself with a few ashen limbs. Space Awareness let her differentiate the flows of their mana, Ilea displacing herself upwards before Heart of Cinder fired from an extended ashen limb.

Much more manageable, she thought and took a deep breath. *It's really quite nice that the Meadow doesn't like killing awakened creatures. And that it can't move on its own.*

She had finally grown at least some confidence in escaping the Ascended's clutches should they meet again. Now she wasn't quite as sure. *Well Heart of Cinder already burned through its metal. I doubt it could pin me down even close to as easily as the Meadow.*

The Ascended could create metal, meaning it too could form runes in the blink of an eye. Coupled with the space magic it wielded, she may still be in trouble.

Just kill more things. Evolve you damn shits, she thought, looking at her Classes.

Fighting the spirits was enjoyable but she definitely had to take a break for a day or two soon. Being among these incomprehensible monsters for extended periods of time wasn't good for her mental health, whether or not she used arcane healing.

In a way she understood how mortals thought of them as gods. Even her puny old self inspired songs and struck fear in people's hearts.

"Come on then, at least an Astral. Barely in their seven fucking hundreds and just a mindless arcane zombie," she murmured to herself, letting the flames of death flow through her phased form, the creatures left confused and searching until her body returned to their fabric of space.