

Chapter 605 Drinks and Baths

Ilea joined the others once more and sat down casually.

“You seem bothered. Did he challenge you? Or me?” Feyrair asked.

“No. But I think this celebration might be a little bigger than I thought. If he’s a random noble who joins. Charlson, who’s coming to this ball?” Ilea asked.

“Oh darling. Everyone,” the man said before he sipped on his drink. “Everyone of import, that is. More specifically, governors, nobility from both Lys and the cities now part of the Accords. Generals and officers, important healers and business owners, and heroes of the war,” he said and paused. “Which means, that you have to be dressed accordingly. And I’m afraid you’d scare away any opportunities with that war dress of yours. I’m thinking of something just as fierce, but a little less unapproachable.”

“Generals?” Ilea asked.

“Yes of course. I hear General Gardt and General Ryse have already arrived. The Empress herself won’t be present but members of the Walker, Karrick, and Redleaf families should be here. I don’t know all however, the attendees are shrouded in secrets,” Charlson explained.

Ah fuck. If Velamyr is here, bringing Feyrair is not just a risk but a damn fucking ridiculous one, she thought and glanced over at the elf.

He gave her a look that said as much as *it’s okay*.

“You’ll still get that dress. Fancy balls suck anyway,” Ilea murmured. *I did want to ride in on his burning shoulders. But I suppose that’s a little too irresponsible, even for me. Damn responsibilities and friends.*

She smiled, already thinking about where they could have a party on their own, with space magic and Meadows.

“What are the Accords you mentioned? Some kind of peace treaty? I assumed the Empire just took over everything,” Ilea said, changing the subject back to the matter at hand. Too much attention on Feyrair would make these two suspicious, even though she already thought them somewhat trustworthy. The woman had shared ale with her after all.

“I was surprised as well. It seems the cooperation of a few powerful cities and their nobility, including Yinnahall, led to a less... should I say severe change of leadership in this former kingdom. Laws by the empire, taxes and reparations, many obligations and a near total change of hands when it comes to most kinds of wealth, but perhaps a few are left with a shred of dignity and a speck of power. The document is talked about in many circles but it has yet to reach common folk such as myself in its full entirety. The Varay Accords, they call them,” he explained.

Ilea raised her eyebrows and glanced towards the door, finding a smirking Elaina looking at her. She tried to hide the expression with her horn but found Ilea staring at her a moment later.

“Yeah, you just met the guy,” she said. “Annoying fellow, but even I have to admit he’s charming.”

If he saw Feyrair and knows what he is. No... I'm pretty sure even a schooled bard and noble would have some sort of discernible reaction to such a revelation.

Even she couldn't see through his armor, nor could she differentiate between him and a human based on anything else. His magic felt powerful but not inherently different than that of a human. She assumed there were other ways, maybe his blood, or soul. But she was somewhat sure the noble just now hadn't understood what her companion was.

Ilea hoped his comments on her presence weren't exaggerated, but he surely took note of her companion as well. Someone like him wouldn't miss that. *Just a powerful friend. I don't have to explain myself to anyone. And if he accused me of cooperating with an elf, all he would do is doom his position. I have powerful friends and surely even Velamyr would back me.*

She relaxed again and finished her ale, smiling when she found Elaina holding out her hand to give her a refill. "Thanks."

"A brilliant negotiator it's said. A shame that he was denounced to an unimportant role under the previous king. But enough talk about politics. Let us get back to the reason you're here," Charlson said with a broad smile.

The discussions done, mostly Ilea saying no to ridiculous suggestions, they left the store to find an inn to stay. The position of the suns suggested afternoon, the tree in front of the tailor shop providing some shade.

She sighed, glancing at Feyrair. "I'm sorry. I really thought it would be possible."

The elf casually touched her lower back. "Ilea, I really don't mind. If anything it would be difficult not to start a fight with the strongest humans around."

"You'll get an opportunity to wear that outfit," she said.

"It's not done yet, and I'm not quite as sure about mine as you are about yours," he said.

Ilea smiled. "Ah come on, I prefer practicality too. But I can't say I'm not excited to see what they come up with. Especially with my future ability to just make it all with ash."

"Timeless clothes are hard to come by, I understand," Fey said. "Now I hear they serve roast platters in the inn Elaina suggested."

"Let's check it out then," Ilea said.

The inn turned out to be more akin to a five star hotel. A massive building with various enchantments of defensive and illusory nature. Ilea could see through the slight enhancements to the general cleanliness but found everything mostly spotless anyway. *Talk about useless magic.*

Instead of the usual common room, a large lounge opened up when they entered. Large sofas, footrests, bookshelves, and even a bar to the very left of the room. To the right lay a double door that led into a restaurant, only two patrons currently present.

"Welcome to the White Basilisk," the clerk said when they walked to the counter.

Ilea smiled. "I don't think they're usually white," she said. "We need a room for a night."

The man smiled. "I'm afraid we're booked out at the moment, miss. But the bar and restaurant are available if you wish to use them."

Ilea sighed, thinking for a moment before she leaned onto the counter and whispered. "This place is not coincidentally owned by a person called Lilith?"

"I'm afraid I'm not allowed to share information like that with customers," the man said, his professional smile remaining on his face.

"Even if it turns out that I am Lilith?" she asked.

"High level Healers are rare but I've heard of plenty trying to use the name," he said.

Ilea spread her wings and summoned her Shadow badge. "Would that be sufficient proof?"

He didn't even blink, gesturing her towards the bar. "Welcome to the White Basilisk, lady Lilith. I'll ready the top floor suite for you in ten minutes. Please make yourself at home and enjoy a drink or meal," the clerk said and vanished, whispering something to the barkeeper before he moved on to another employee in the restaurant. He appeared in a staff room upstairs and clapped, saying a few words to the people apparently on a break. They shot up and rushed out before he appeared again behind the counter, nothing about him suggesting he had ever left.

[Bard – lvl 85]

Lots of bards around here, Ilea thought with a smile. "So I assume we do have some stake in this business?"

"Indeed. Substantially so," he said.

Ilea smiled, walking to the bar and gesturing Fey to follow. Getting a suite was nice but she was more excited about a certain mark that closed in on the city. *Should I hide Feyrair? Hmm... probably not. I doubt she'd care much even if she knew.*

She ordered the local ale and relaxed.

"I assume this is considered quite luxurious? Compared to the places we've visited before, it certainly is," the elf commented before he motioned to the barkeeper. "I'll take whatever you recommend. Try to impress me."

The man got to work without a word, going so far as to summon a cube of ice he carefully placed into the drink.

The elf got another six drinks before the clerk motioned to them.

Does he know I can see him? Or will he actually call for us if we don't react?, she thought and appeared in front of him.

"The suite is ready," he said. "Stairs or teleportation?"

Feyrair joined them with his glass in hand.

"Why use stairs when we have magic?" Ilea asked with a smile.

The man bowed lightly before he vanished, Ilea and Feyrair following. They appeared in front of a closed door.

"The suite reduces any sound going out to nearly nothing. Any low level investigation and spying spells won't work and anything else will activate an alarm. However I'm deeply sorry to inform you

that we have no security measures in place against someone with such unprecedented magical power, nor their enemies who would surely be of similar standing,” the middle aged man informed and unlocked the door with a rune covered key, several enchantments going out when he opened the threshold for them.

He stepped in after them and gestured to a small bell standing on a small round desk. “If you need anything at all, simply ring the bell.”

“How does that work?” Ilea asked, looking around the massive suite. A large king sized bed stood to the left, two sofas and several arm chairs in the center, and a lavish bath to the right. A massive window spanned most of the wall facing outwards, a shimmering hue of magic visible through her sphere.

“Enhanced sound perception. It’s a skill many bards call their own. If you’re wondering about the windows, they’re enchanted to prevent anybody from outside to see into the room. Through conventional means that is. Eyes,” the man said.

Ilea tapped the glass before displacing herself outside and back in. “Impressive,” she said. “Did you manage this place before the war?”

“I did indeed,” the man said.

“Employ any slaves?” she asked, Feyrair glancing at the man now too.

If he was nervous, he didn’t show it. “Of course, ma’am. Optimizations were not only encouraged but expected. However none have left this establishment in the past year except poor Owyr. He would’ve been quite excited about the new contracts.”

“What happened to him?” Ilea asked, checking out the large bath. It looked like a fancy whirlpool tub with several runed devices ready to be activated.

“I hear he felt a more direct approach was necessary and joined a force to overthrow certain nobility in this city. Though his efforts were valiant, he found less success than certain others,” the man said.

“And you don’t mind the changes?” Ilea asked.

“Oh by no means. The White Basilisk will retain its reputation and build on it. That has been and will remain my goal. The new owners will make that endeavor much more achievable,” he explained.

“Good. As long as you’re all happy about the arrangement. Do file a complaint if such isn’t the case,” Ilea said.

“We were informed about the possibility. It is appreciated,” he said and bowed.

“What’s your name by the way?” Ilea asked.

“Meretin Gustave, at your service,” he said and bowed.

“Nice to meet you, Mr. Gustave,” she said.

“If there is nothing else, I shall return to my post,” the man said and vanished precisely three seconds later.

Feyrair checked out the bar that occupied a part of the left wall. “I’m beginning to think that humanity is superior after all. In all but battle.”

“Enjoying your liquor?” Ilea asked, jumping on the bed as she switched to more comfortable clothes.

“You should try some too. The tastes are fascinating, though I’m not sure why they mix alcohol into everything. It’s diluting the whole beverage... or maybe that’s the point?” he said.

“It’s a strong enough poison to inhibit human senses. Just enough to be fun,” Ilea said.

He glanced at her in confusion. “Really? This?”

“Doesn’t work on me anymore either. But there are some who specialize in high resistance substances,” she said, thinking back on her tea and cake date with Helena. “Nothing with any lasting effects of course but quite interesting nonetheless.”

“More interesting than battle?” Feyrair asked.

“No. Of course not,” Ilea said. “We have time. Are you going to try all those bottles or are you going to join me?”

The elf looked between the bar and her before he grabbed a few bottles and appeared next to her.

Ilea enjoyed the restaurant’s menu, her full attention on the fourth plate. Beautifully marinated beef covered in spicy herbs. They would have to get their clothes from Charlson and Elaina later but she still had some time until the ball would start.

She smiled when someone entered the restaurant and looked around, the woman’s eyes stopping when they found her. “Here you are,” she said. “Didn’t expect an inn to have defensive enchantments.”

“Messed with your wind?” Ilea asked as she finished the plate and displaced it into the sink in the kitchen.

“A little,” Felicia said with a smile.

Ilea displaced them both into her suite. Feyrair was busy at the bar downstairs, apparently interested in drink making lessons.

“Fancy. You own the place, don’t you?” Felicia asked, stepping up to the window to enjoy the view extending over most of Yinnahall and the plains beyond.

“Think they’d let me in otherwise?” Ilea asked, starting to fill the tub with steaming water.

Felicia glanced at her, her black hair immaculate and her near yellow eyes accented by the warm magical light from the lamps. “You certainly don’t dress according to your status. The perceived status that is.”

“What’s the difference?” Ilea asked, noting that the woman wore an elegant imperial uniform. She looked official and somewhat dangerous.

“Well, one is that of an incredibly rich benefactor to many cities and businesses in the plains, a war hero, downright myth. The real one is just you. The much more terrifying option,” she said with a smirk.

“Tailor is working on something at the moment, don’t you worry,” Ilea said.

Felicia raised her brows. “Oh? Now that is exciting. I wish I could’ve come here as Felicia Redleaf and not Major Redleaf. Ah the joys of being an independent adventuring hero.”

“How have you been? It’s been a few months,” Ilea said and stored her clothes, using some ash to cover her body before she blinked into the massive tub. She breathed out and shuddered slightly as the heat enveloped her.

Felicia remained where she stood, glancing over to her for a moment before she turned back to the city. “Busy. I’m glad the war is over but the aftershocks will be felt for years to come. Greetings from Aliana and Maria.”

“How is your favorite void magic tool?” Ilea asked.

Felicia raised her hand to the window, a slight swirl of air around her finger before she touched it. “Providing evidence. Too many eyes on us in the capital. She can’t act too brazen anymore. Or she has to hide it better. Aliana is well. I think she likes it, took well to managing some of our properties,” she said.

“How’s your brother?” Ilea asked. “You’re free to join by the way,” she added with a slight smile.

“The ball is in a few hours. I’d rather not get distracted,” Felicia said.

Hmm?

“Edwin is... I’m not sure,” she said and shook her head. “Some days are better than others. At least he agreed to do adventuring jobs to pay for his excesses. He let me know that he’s happy to fight you in a duel again. I however ask you to refrain. He came back bloodied and cut up three times already. If he can’t even handle the monsters near Virilya, he’s no match for something far more dangerous.”

“He’s strong enough,” Ilea said.

Felicia huffed. “He’s an idiot. I’m worried about him. I know he can take care of himself but it’s been months and there’s no sign of him getting better. I just wish there was something that could give him purpose again. He doesn’t care about our House, the city, anyone.”

“Don’t know if I can help you there,” Ilea said.

“I didn’t ask for help. I know you don’t seem to care much but I remember what he did. You of all people should be happy about his current state,” she said.

Ilea put her hands on the rim of the tub and rested her head on them. “I don’t give a fuck about Edwin. But I don’t want you to worry. Hey, know what? Can I offer you a contact?”

“For what?” Felicia asked.

“To talk maybe. Trian Alymie. He has a... well not exactly similar background but he was a noble too. You know what happened and I find that he’s better these days. Maybe he could offer some advice. Just write him if you feel like it,” Ilea said.

The woman remained quiet for a while before she spoke. “I might. Thank you. And just in case you’re unaware, I wouldn’t mention his House’s name to anybody you don’t trust fully. While the Birminghamales weren’t particularly influential, it’s generally frowned upon to slaughter entire noble Houses.”

“Noted,” Ilea said in a dry tone.

“And I’m not sure what the survivors would do if they knew a head of the Medic Sentinels was responsible for the death of most of their House,” Felicia said.

“They know I was there,” Ilea said.

“Yes, but you’re downright untouchable at the moment. Your actions in Riverwatch and Baralia made waves, let alone the announcement of the Sentinels and their performance so far,” Felicia said.

“They’re that good?” Ilea asked with a smirk.

“There are too few as of yet but knowing it was your organization, I kept myself informed. And others did too. So far nobody acted. A smart move to provide a service similar to the adventurers guild. They’re understaffed as it is. Little reason to obstruct you when you’re not stepping on anybody’s toes,” Felicia explained.