

## Chapter 803 Remembrance

Ilea arrived at the Halstein gate with Trian and Kyrian. She wore her Timeless set of bone armor. Kyrian in a less imposing version of his metal armor, and Trian wearing his own set of stonehammer steel and bone armor. They drew quite a bit of attention, a few guards already leaving to inform their higher ups.

Ember had her friends in the Sentinels, but she had been a Corinth healer before. While her time at the healing order had been difficult, she had still been trained by them, had formed connections and bonds. She had left those behind when she chose to flee Dawntree after the revolution, to go south and find a new future in Ravenhall, but the Sentinels thought it appropriate to inform and invite those of the Corinth Order who wished to attend the funeral.

The recent reports of the Accords would soon create tension within the Plains. Powerful people and perhaps even entire nations were involved in the collection of information on and production of the teleportation gate copies. An act that violated the treaties they had with the Accords. Investigations and diplomatic talks both within and outside of the Accords were still in process but none of the present three were adequate for any of the operations. Trian was the only one of them with formal diplomatic education, but he decided his position as Headmaster of the Sentinels provided some issues in regards to objectivity in this matter.

Ilea hoped herself and Kyrian wouldn't be needed in the coming days and weeks, the only real benefit they provided was overwhelming force. The talks she had participated in made it clear that their discovery in Nara and subsequent actions could shift the current diplomatic landscape in the Plains. While the Accords agreed that a total war against all human nations of the Plains could be won with the help of the Taleen machines, the destruction of both infrastructure and lives would be unacceptable. Let alone the following political nightmare. Absolute control imposed by Aki would be the only long term solution in that case and such was against everything the Accords stood for. Cooperation between nations and peoples, progress through collaboration and mutually beneficial treaties.

Perhaps the fast presentation and spread of the machine armies had been a mistake, now pushing nations to work against the Accords due to the potential take over of their own land and peoples. The existence of lesser teleportation gates implied that the Accords and their technology wasn't untouchable. Which in turn meant that future treaties and inclusion of the machines would perhaps be delayed or outright refused. It would prevent the same progress seen in cities and new settlements of the Accords but depending on what priorities the respective leaders had, they might choose power and independence over the benefits of working with Aki. Just as those behind the gates had chosen. Next to their wish to continue their trade of slaves.

Ilea led her two companions to the city gates where a fair number of guards had cleared the street, a woman in plate armor bowing towards them in a respectful manner.

"Greetings, Lilith, Headmaster Trian, and Kyrian. May I inquire about your visit to Halstein?" she said, aware of the mood though remaining calm.

Trian glanced at Ilea and took a step forward. "One of our own has lost their life in battle. They were once a member of the Corinth Order. We wish to communicate this to the High Clerics and Paladins."

The woman gave him a considering look. “Of course. I’m sorry for your loss, Headmaster. Your Sentinels are well respected in Kroll. Their reputation is well deserved, it is saddening to hear one of them has lost their life. May I escort you personally?”

Trian gave her a nod. “Please do.”

Quite a few of the guards nodded as they passed, more than half raising their weapons with points and blades aimed towards the ground. Ilea raised her brows but didn’t comment.

“A gesture of respect,” the guard captain said after they had passed the gate. “One used for those fallen in the service of Kroll. I apologize in their behalf if such is cause for offense.”

“It’s an honor,” Trian said, the four continuing in silence until they reached one of the temples of the Corinth Order.

It seemed they had their own informants near the Halstein gates or near the city walls, a group of Paladins and Clerics already present. Ilea spotted Bryce walking towards them, his blonde hair in a braid, the heavy white plate armor he wore entirely spotless.

He took in the group and bowed. “Welcome, Lilith and company.”

“Bryce. It’s good to see you,” she said with a light smile.

“To what do we owe the attention?” he asked, focusing on her.

Trian repeated what he had told the guard before he continued. “Her name was Ember Hadley. She was based in Dawntree.”

“I understand. May Hella guide her way and may Friede receive her with open arms,” he spoke and summoned his greatsword, raising it as it started to glow. He closed his eyes and murmured a short prayer. All the other Corinth members offered similar gestures. Bryce opened his eyes once more and looked to Trian. “May we help in this regard?”

“We merely invite those who knew her to join the funeral. Tomorrow at the break of dawn, we meet at the eastern gates of Ravenhall. All are welcome,” Trian said.

Bryce bowed once again. “I will make sure those who knew her will know. And I will be there personally.”

“Thank you,” Ilea said, giving him a light nod.

He returned the gesture. “Until then.”

The trio returned to the gates and chose their next destination through the hub in Morhill. Utach, a mountain town in Kroll. It was the closest teleportation gate to the Caverns of Rot, many of the dungeons in non Accords nations not yet equipped with their own dedicated gates.

Ilea took in a deep breath when she looked over the mountainous landscape visible from the elevated location of the town. Trian put his hand onto her shoulder.

She spread her wings and flew up, followed by the others.

Their journey wasn’t long, Kyrian aiding Trian in the second half to speed them up.

Ilea led them into the small town and towards the building she had once dined in. It looked smaller than she remembered. The foundation was made of stone, wooden beams inlaid and a few murky windows letting through some light. Stairs led up to the second floor where another family had made their home. The air was crisp despite the time of year, though there was no snow covering the tiled roofs of the nearby houses.

She took off her helmet, deciding not to intrude on the home with her dominion. Trian and Kyrian were by her side. She stood in front of the door and raised her fist but hesitated. Fighting monsters was easy. Putting her own life on the line, it felt right, felt like the way forward. She loved it, thrived in it. But here she was, feeling as lost and afraid as when she had first arrived in Elos. Her healing would prevent lasting psychological trauma. Her pain tolerance removed the physical sensation entirely. Fear Resistance helped her overcome the feeling of indecisiveness.

She knew that Willa had wanted to become a Sentinel. She knew that Willa had chosen to investigate the slavers. She knew that she had fought with everything she had.

And still she felt the weight in her stomach, the actions and decisions that had led to this point. The doubt and guilt that wanted her to leave and find the next monster to fight.

But she wasn't just a monster slayer. Ilea had helped found the Medic Sentinel Corps. She was part of the Accords. And she was Lilith. The myth that had inspired Willa to seek out more. To leave this town. To go on an adventure.

She knocked.

Seconds passed until the door opened. Briana had a cheerful expression on her face, a spatula in her hand with some flour visible on her simple apron.

Ilea hadn't remembered the thick brown hair now up in a knot, she had forgotten the freckles on the woman's face, the youth still present despite the wrinkles around her eyes. Eyes that now widened as she glanced at Ilea and her companions, her expression changing to one that mimicked theirs.

They remained silent for a few seconds, Andres joining them when the spatula hit the ground.

"What happened?" he said, his lips quivering slightly before he looked up and met Ilea's eyes.

"Willa investigated rumors of slavery inside a former Baralia city. She was killed in battle. I'm sorry," Ilea said. She felt her words were hollow. Meaningless. She didn't know what else to say when Briana broke down with a wail, Andres raising his fist as his eyes watered.

He stepped towards her, his entire body shaking. "It was you..." he said in a quiet voice. "She followed you." His voice cracked slightly. Earth magic emanated from his hand before he shook his head and went back to Briana, hugging her whilst whispering quiet words.

Trian stepped past Ilea but gave them time. A few minutes passed before he talked. "I'm the Headmaster of the Medic Sentinels. Both me and the faculty have trained Willa to the best of our abilities. She was a good fighter, quick and bold, never one to back down. She died protecting the Sentinels in her team. Two of them are still with us. Phoebe and Mila. Friends she made while being with us."

He waited as Andres helped up Briana. The man glanced between Ilea and Trian. "Can you tell us what happened?"

"Everything we know," Trian said. "May I join you? Or do you wish to remain alone for a time?"

Andres looked at his wife.

She nodded ever so slightly.

“You may join. All of you. I want to know what happened to my daughter,” he said and walked inside.

The next twenty minutes, Trian explained some of the training, the team assignments, the dungeon exercises, and ultimately how the four Sentinels came to learn of the slavers in Nara. How they investigated and how they were found and fought.

“The machines arrived less than a minute after the fight had started,” Trian said. “But it was too late.”

“Less than a minute...” Andres shook his head. “What kind of people could do such a thing?”

“Every Sentinel trains their resistances and has healing magic available to them, but even then, it’s not a guarantee,” Trian said.

“What about the others in her team?” Briana said.

“Phoebe and Mila survived. Ember succumbed to her injuries,” Trian said.

“How are they now?” Briana asked.

Trian looked to Kyrian.

“They are in the Headquarters, with other Sentinels there. I haven’t ever seen them this shaken,” Kyrian said.

“Is it possible for us to meet them?” Briana asked.

Andres glanced her way.

“They were Willa’s friends. I want to get to know them,” the woman said.

“The funeral works, but we can’t afford a longer stay,” Andres said.

“We can provide a place. And gold won’t be an issue,” Ilea said.

Andres shook his head. “We’re not looking for handouts, Ilea.”

“Handouts won’t be necessary,” Trian said. “Willa saved up a large part of her wages. One of her peers told me she planned to buy the inn here, once she was as strong as Lilith. She said you two could get a room there, or maybe a floor.” He paused and seemed to remember. “Just the first floor, because that one wasn’t as nice as the second, which would be hers.”

Briana smiled. “That does sound like her.”

“She wouldn’t have been there most of the time anyway,” Andres said before he rubbed his eyes. “Can you... leave us be, for now?”

“Of course,” Trian said and stood up. “Someone will come and get you tomorrow, if that is acceptable.”

Andres nodded, his eyes unfocused and towards the wooden table. Briana held his hand, tears welling up again.

Ilea stood and followed Trian out into the cool air, taking a shivering breath as Kyrian quietly closed the door behind them.

*She followed you.*

Ilea shook her head.

“Will you be okay?” Trian asked, looking at her.

Ilea summoned her mantle. “I think so. What about you two?”

Trian smiled. The man seemed tired, though it didn’t show much on his face. Just the way he held himself, the look in his eyes, Ilea could tell.

“With time,” he said.

Kyrian grunted. “Yes. With time. Now let’s go and see the Sentinels. Together.”

“Sounds like an idea,” Ilea said. “Been too long since I trained with them.”

“No better way to deal with stress and grief than fighting?” Trian asked with a smile. “Didn’t expect anything else from you.”

“I don’t know actually. I just know I should be there,” Ilea said and activated her third tier transfer, teleporting them to her home.

A short flight later, they arrived in Ravenhall, the three welcomed by the Shadowguard at the gates, soon in the Sentinel Headquarters where a set of young Medics guarded the stairs.

They found Phoebe and Mila in one of the training halls, accompanied by a dozen Sentinels. One Medic team was fighting a single Hunter.

“You should challenge yourself, not toy with your foes,” Kyrian said as he walked straight into the fight. “All of you, against me.”

“But that wouldn’t be a challenge for you,” one of them said.

“There is only one person in this room that would provide a challenge for me,” Kyrian said. “And I don’t think she’s in the mood. Yet.”

Ilea ignored them and sat down on the bench next to Phoebe and Mila, staying close but not saying a word. She didn’t know what to say after all, and it seemed like the two women felt the same. Ilea crossed her arms and watched the fighting. *Maybe I needed to be here just as much as they did.*

She watched the ash armored healers battle her friend, Trian sitting down next to her a few minutes later. Ilea summoned a barrel of ale and started to share it around. “To Ember and Willa,” she spoke, raising her jug.

“To Ember and Willa,” Phoebe repeated, as did other nearby Sentinels, the fighting reduced to two similarly leveled battle healers.

Ilea stayed for a few hours until Phoebe and Mila excused themselves.

“I have to interview a few potential new students,” Trian said as he stood up. “Can I leave you two alone?”

Kyrian glanced at Ilea. “I thought about going to Virilya.”

“Me too,” Ilea said. “I’ll tell her she should inform Aliana.”

“I’d appreciate it,” Kyrian said as they prepared to leave.

*“If you’re around, I could use a hug. If you can, let Aliana know Kyrian is coming too,”* Ilea sent to Felicia.

*“Of course. We’ll be around,”* Felicia sent back.

Ilea felt relieved. She hoped the political issues wouldn’t get between the two of them. It was nice with her. And right now, she could use some comfort.

The evening and night came and went. Ilea lay awake thinking on the past few days, weeks, and months. The teleportation gates had been around for a while by now, the Sphere and Aki’s taleen armies rather recent. Taleen dwarves in the Accords, Cerithil Hunters in the Descent. It was quite a lot. A lot of change, and a lot of power that she and her allies now had at their disposal. Conflict was bound to crop up here and there as they expanded and grew. This was just the first hurdle.

She sat up on the side of the bed and looked out onto the dark courtyard of the Redleaf mansion, one of the moons visible in the skies above. *The world is growing smaller.*

“Are you going?” Felicia asked.

Ilea turned to see her lying on her side, yellow eyes taking her in. “Yes. I don’t want to be late.”

“It’s going to go okay. And I’m sure it will help. At least a little,” Felicia said before she moved up and hugged her.

“It’s part of it. I knew that,” Ilea said.

Felicia tapped her nose. “Doesn’t mean it’s easy. Even with arcane healing.”

“I suppose you’re right,” Ilea said and looked back outside.

“I’m here, whenever you need me,” Felicia said.

Ilea raised her brows. “Sure. I’ll just snatch you out of imperial meetings.”

“To a reasonable extent,” Felicia said. “Alyris knows you, as do a few of the higher ranked nobles. They would understand. Or maybe they’d consider it a matter of national security to keep you happy, but that’s not exactly how I think about it.”

“I know the thought excites you,” Ilea said.

Felicia tightened her hug. “And I know it terrifies you.”

“Just a little. Sometimes,” Ilea said. “And only when I’m here in the Plains.”

“That’s why I’m glad you’re the one who holds such power,” Felicia answered. “Now go. Give them a send off worthy of ancient heroes. And celebrate who they were in life.”

Ilea kissed her before she stood up. “We will. Thank you.”

She found Kyrian waiting in the courtyard, the man sitting on one of the two small stone pillars at the bottom of the stairs.

“Ready to go?” he asked.

“I am,” she said and activated her third tier transfer.