

Chapter 611 Catching up

Ilea smiled, feeling his curse waver before it vanished entirely.

The man nearly stumbled as she held on, his hand reaching around her back before he hesitated.

She didn't care, giving him the time he needed after all this time he may have spent entirely devoid of human contact.

He breathed in sharply before his hand came to rest on her back, and then his other. He hugged her back, his head coming to rest on her shoulder before a sob went through him.

"It's okay," Ilea said, her voice shaking slightly. "I'm glad we found you. I'm glad you're alive," she murmured.

"It's ... it's really you," Kyrian said after a while, his voice dulled by the heavy steel plate around his body. He had let go of the chains in his right hand, the large steel links simply floating in the air behind him.

"It's me," Ilea said and moved the ash away from her face.

"Ilea... I knew you would find me," he said, his voice cracking a little before he hugged her with renewed vigor. "I didn't know what to do... I," he said before he turned around, letting go of her to grab the chains again. The Wyvern carcass had started to slide away. "I'm... I'm sorry."

She watched, fascinated as the four large chains tightened around the massive body, the two remaining chains quickly spinning around it too before he pulled, Kyrian's body itself floating up before he moved closer to the tunnel. Ilea identified him in passing, following him inside as Feyrair made space for the two humans and the corpse.

[Mage – lvl 412]

You definitely haven't been idle, she thought, grinning as she saw the look in Fey's eyes. "He's human, just in case you didn't know."

He hissed and crossed his arms before he started to laugh.

Kyrian let go of the chains when the body was secured, glancing at the elf before he turned to Ilea. "I... I don't know what to say."

"Nobody on the isle?," Ilea asked.

He shook his head lightly. "No. Nobody I could... find. Plenty of monsters," he added and laughed awkwardly, glancing at Feyrair before he stopped. "I was... alone," he said and nodded to himself a few times, glancing back at her a few seconds later, the chains rippling slightly as they pushed against the Wyvern's skin. "I was alone here," he said again and touched his shoulder.

"I'm sorry. For taking so long," Ilea said and walked over to him, carefully touching his arm. He flinched at the contact. "For leaving you alone."

"It wasn't your fault," Kyrian said. "I never blamed you. I did blame Arthur... I did blame him," he said.

"Arthur is dead. Felicia was the one to kill him," Ilea said.

That seemed to do something, Kyrian stumbling back before he sat down on the bloody Wyvern corpse. He laughed, a wave of curse magic flowing out before he repressed it again. "I'm glad it was her," he said finally, his voice deep and in control. "I'm glad it was her."

He sighed deeply, shuddering slightly before he talked again. "Oh and I did blame myself. At first. For not being able to help. I was afraid you had died... can you believe it? You? Die?" he didn't laugh this time. "But I moved past that. There was only one thing I could do. But I failed at that as well."

"You didn't fail at anything," Ilea said. "You survived. Even if you had just hidden, scavenged, there would be no shame in that. But well... you went with the Shadow way," she added and gestured to the dead monster.

He grunted. "Tough ones, these. Northern Bluetail. Wind and Water magic, especially deadly close to the ocean. Would've thought they're better fliers but I won't face one of them underwater again until I get a major evolution," he said with a chuckle, slightly patting the dead creature. "I do hope you saw the warnings. You came through the gate? Or did you fly here?"

"The gate," Ilea said. "What's their level range?" she asked, not able to keep her interest at bay.

"Still the same Ilea. I'm glad you didn't change. But I did have a small hope to have grown stronger than you. Stupid, now that I think about it. Can't imagine what kind of monsters you fought when I think back on the years I spent on these isles..." he said and quieted down, shaking his head lightly.

Ilea smiled. "I'll tell you all about it. When's the last time you had a good meal?"

The steel mage looked at the Wyvern for a few seconds before he sighed. "They don't taste good. Fish is better."

"I can imagine," Ilea said before she pointed to the elf. "That's Feyrair by the way. A Cerithil Hunter I met on my travels. He's an elf who fights Taleen machines."

Kyrian looked him up and down. "Not how I imagined them. Welcome to the Krahen Isles, Feyrair. I'm Kyrian."

Feyrair removed the armor on his head and bowed lightly. "It's good to meet you, Kyrian, friend of Ilea, and hunter of the Northern Bluetail. I too would be interested in knowing more about these creatures."

"I can see why you like him," Kyrian said. "Some are as low as six hundred, others... I've fought a few four marks even, but those are rare. Farther out, deeper down."

Feyrair glanced at Ilea and grinned.

"A meal sounds... good. The Vrayar must be starving too," Kyrian said and stood up, grabbing his chains before he started pulling the creature down the tunnel.

"What happened when you came here?" Ilea asked, walking next to him, the elf a little further back.

"When I came here... when I came here. I was confused. Of course I was. I understood what had happened. Arthur had somehow teleported us into a Taleen dungeon, though I was alone so I assume you resisted, or you were moved somewhere else," he said.

"The latter," Ilea said.

"The girl make it? She was close by," he asked.

“Maybe. She got stranded in the north, not quite as hard to escape from as this place, seeing your level,” Ilea said.

He snorted. “Yeah.” He paused for a moment. “Well the platform was there so I knew there was some way to operate it. But I didn’t have a way to even activated the damned thing, and I tried. A lot. I tried a lot. But I had to get food too, shelter, needed to know where I was, how to get back. If the gate wasn’t an option, more conventional travel had to do. Well you being with a Cerithil Hunter, was it? You both know the machines well. I do now too,” he said and snickered. “I do.”

“Did you clear out the dungeon?” Ilea asked.

“Not until... half a year ago maybe? A little longer perhaps. Praetorians were hard to crack, but once I had my third Class it became quite easy. A little disappointing to be honest, but by then the machines weren’t particularly impressive anyway,” he explained.

Ilea grinned, glancing at her teammate. “You got a third Class? So you killed a level seven fifty creature and survived battling three four marks?”

“Wish it was just three,” he said. “Four marks that is. There are a lot of them here, especially near the volcano and down in the depths, let alone the ocean. I would’ve reached the mainland a year ago if it weren’t for the Bluetails.”

“But you had to kill one too, or contribute to a kill, right?” Ilea said.

“Got lucky. You know the monsters here don’t all work together. There are clear hierarchies, and they think I’m at the very bottom. Not that I belong there. Not anymore. But we’re small, and I suppose for most humans it would be true,” he explained and glanced back at Feyrair. “Not sure about Elves. I hear you’re strong.”

“They start at two hundred or something,” Ilea said. “Not particularly impressive either.”

Fey hissed.

“You know it’s true,” she added.

“Third Class gave me a lot more regeneration. I guess I got inspired by you,” he said with a chuckle. “And I got a teleportation ability finally. Not sure how I survived without that beforehand. Made everything much... and when I say much, I mean a fucking lot, easier.”

“Yeah, it was the main reason I didn’t die in my first month here,” Ilea said, thinking back on her early Drake fights, the thugs who had kidnapped Alice, and getting away from that elf below Riverwatch. She glanced at Fey.

“What?” he asked.

She hissed.

“Congratulations on the third Class then. I don’t think a lot of people get it that early to be honest. Do you have third tier General skills too?” she asked instead.

“I don’t think a lot of people are teleported to a set of isles with this many high level monsters, let alone a seemingly ceaseless supply of Miststalkers. With nothing else to do but getting stronger,” Kyrian said. “No... I haven’t gotten those yet. Would be interested in how it works.”

“I’ll explain it to you,” Ilea said. “Some resistance training and you’ll be there in a few months, I’m sure. Now that you can heal yourself, it’ll be even easier. How’s your Pain Tolerance?”

The man shuddered. "Oh... second tier. I'm glad for that one. One of the reasons I'm still alive. And I don't heal, I just regenerate quickly. It's not quite as precise or useful as your spells, but it does the job, especially coupled with my curses. I did get many resistances, some even at the end of the second tier by now," he explained.

"So you didn't clear the Taleen until half a year ago?" Ilea asked, bringing the conversation back to the previous topic.

"The Taleen provided a good challenge but when I came out of that town and found where I was. Well the lightning and the mists were... disconcerting. I remembered your stories from the demon realm... thought I might not even be in the same realm anymore. But I adapted soon. Trained with the Miststalkers for months, working on my skills and resistances until I could slowly overwhelm them. The Taleen coupled with the Miststalkers provided good levels and when fishing became the most dangerous activity of my day to day life, I moved on to explore the isle. Turned out there were a few more.

"The Bluetails nearly killed me many times. That was before I got my third Class too of course. I wandered around and fought. I fought and fought. But many of the creatures turned out too dangerous to face and I had to retreat many times. I couldn't just go at them directly either. Only the Miststalkers and non Praetorian Taleen were things I could directly face at that point. The returns weren't good anymore however, barely a trickle despite me fighting them alone."

"How did you fight them then?" Ilea asked.

"Not your way," Kyrian said and snickered. "I prepared traps... entire areas covered in curse runes, steel chains, spikes, spears. Everything I could think of with the skills I had. And then I waited. Bait turned out to be more effective, so I used that. Large fish, birds, the rare creatures I managed to hunt. Few on these isles... but some manage to survive here. I remember the first Bluetail I caught. Level seven hundred. I would've fled had I known its power. But it never found me, hidden away just a few dozen meters above the laid out traps. A slow decay. Three days I meditated, drained, and cursed the creature until it finally died."

"No others came to help it?" Ilea asked.

"They're not exactly bright. Even the ones I catch hardly ever attack the runes or chains directly. They're more confused if anything. Confused and furious, that someone dared ground them. After that it just became easier. Some escaped of course, their magic too much for my steel back then to handle for prolonged periods of time. Some were just too strong to begin with. But I could gain a few levels with each one I managed to take down."

Feyrair hissed, shaking his head.

"Had I treated them as opponents, I would've died," Kyrian said with a shrug. "So I treated them as prey. Quite effectively I have to say. Their corpses attracted more of their kind, sometimes seven or eight dying in a row, trying to feast on their brethren."

"Could work with your kind too," Ilea said, looking at the elf.

"Says the one whose species sets pyres alight to send off their dead, gathering dozens more around the beacon. How very effective to avoid predators," Feyrair said.

"Stop bickering," Kyrian said. "I simply did the most effective thing I could think of. This has no connection to funerals or eating habits."

"We're just messing around," Ilea said.

Feyrair hissed, in an affirmative way.

“I knew you would come for me at some point. I just knew it. The Divination cast on me made sure I never forgot. It was Cless, wasn’t it?” he asked.

“It was,” Ilea said.

Kyrian laughed. “I knew it. I knew it. That wonderful spirit. I knew you would come, but I didn’t want to be rescued, didn’t want to be useless. So I fought. I killed. I trained. I did what I had to to survive and to advance. The caverns below proved treacherous, any creature ready to fill the tunnels with fire and lava, or simply collapsing an entire section when it felt too threatened. Most of them can burrow too.

“It was during one of those cavern dives that I came upon two competing Wyrms. I had seen a few before, two times barely getting away with my life. No teleportation. I watched them battle, for hours, the heat and magic palpable from hundreds of meters away. Monstrous beyond anything I had seen. No offense,” Kyrian said, gesturing to Ilea.

She just blinked her eyes.

“One of them was badly injured after the fight. It fled, barely managing to reach its burrow where it simply fell asleep. Can you imagine? A massive creature of fire and lava, just sleeping,” he explained.

I can. Yes.

“It never woke. I did the same as I had with the Bluetails. Prepared my runes within its very burrow, my magic and life likely so insignificant it either didn’t register me or it was far more injured than I thought. My chains were there but I doubt they would’ve done much had it woken up. But it didn’t. It just slept as the curses took hold, as I drained it of mana and health. I nearly died just staying as close as I did,” Kyrian said and laughed again.

“Humans,” Feyrair said and hissed again.

“We do make use of the opportunities we are given,” Kyrian said and chuckled to himself. “If you think less of me for that, Feyrair, then so be it.”

“I think you did really fucking well,” Ilea said with a smile. “I had to get my third Class to kill my first solo four mark. I did fight it somewhat directly though.”

“You’re as powerful as a four mark?” Kyrian asked.

“Not exactly. Fought it for ages, and I had to recover my mana constantly. A long battle of attrition, but I came out on top. Mostly because it was stupid,” she said.

He nodded. “Seems to be the only way we can stand up to true power. For now that is. You’re close to five hundred. And you have a third Class too. We will get there,” he said. “What kind of magic did you get?”

“Space,” Ilea said. “Met a few more Fae, the little guy we once rescued back with our team,” she said and paused for a moment. She had yet to bring it up. *Later*, she thought. “So now I can teleport even more effectively, and got some other cool shit.”

“Cool shit,” Kyrian mused and snickered. “Well things became easier after that. Teleportation coupled with the other direct improvements and higher regeneration allowed me to hunt the Bluetails more effectively. I didn’t have to resort to trapping them. I could face them. And that’s

been what I did since then. Some exploration here and there but the Iznakor dungeon offered little and the keeps strewn throughout the isles are far more dangerous than simply fighting Miststalkers, while offering fewer rewards. I do still wonder who built them, and why they were abandoned. The Golems and Gargoyles are impressive too. Perhaps not as much as the machines of the Taleen but certainly better than anything else I've ever seen. The caverns below are far more dangerous compared to just fighting Bluetails, so I mostly avoided them after I managed to kill the Wyrms. I would've escaped in time. But now that you're here... well I'm not sure. But I'm glad," he said.

"You can figure out what you want to do in your own time," Ilea said. "A lot happened in the past two years. Plenty to talk about first, to give you some perspective."

"I'm more interested in that meal right now," Kyrian said when they reached the keep again.

Ilea watched as the flail like chains rippled with magic, unwinding from the massive Bluetail corpse before they slammed down on it, ripping away chunks with sheer brute force. Blood and guts splattered onto the stone ground as the metal mage continued to devastate the body.

"They can't handle the tough scales," he explained before walking to the locked door where the birds were kept. "You two can handle a bit of soul magic?"

"We met them earlier," Ilea said.

"Are they bait?" Feyrair asked.

Kyrian chuckled as he walked inside, the chains on the birds falling away as he went to one knee and hugged the approaching creatures. "Hush, yes, yes. Food is here. Don't be greedy, James!"

"They're not," Ilea said, crossing her arms as she watched the blood of the Bluetail pool out onto the cold ground.