

## Chapter 443 Impressions

*Trian was right, these guys are hungry. And not just that girl who still has a plate of food with her. Seems like she forgot about it though. Now it's cold. Maybe she isn't so smart after all, Ilea thought.*

Her decision to not remove her head in the first lesson was probably the right one. Maybe the second one then.

Only a few of them had looked away when she had cut off her own arm, all of them watching her now. She could feel that a few were distressed but most of them had different expressions on their faces.

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Hadley couldn't believe her eyes. The woman had cut off her own arm without flinching and regrew it in seconds.

Most of the people around her didn't know the pain of losing a limb. She herself had only lost a couple fingers but the pain had nearly knocked her out. She had been lucky, a guard had heard her scream and brought her to a healer he knew.

*If I could attain that power... still, it doesn't mean she is particularly strong. Many warriors can cut off limbs after all. There are mages who can burn you up in seconds.*

"That won't help you win against a mage. They'll just burn you up until you're out of mana," Lyza said. The teacher seemed unfazed.

"Good thing then that most of my skills are combat oriented. Aki, I heard you advanced quite a bit, you even got some upgrades it seems. Care to test yourself against me?" Ilea asked.

Hadley glanced at the machine, a shiver going down her back. It was relentless, powerful, fast. Unfeeling. Even the other teachers respected it.

*Is she stupid?*

"Are you sure? We don't want to make a mess," Aki said.

*He's sounding apprehensive? Really? They know each other.*

"Don't worry, I won't hit you very hard," Lilith said with a vicious grin on her face.

Hadley watched as the machine jumped up and landed a dozen meters away from the healer. Some of the people stood up to see better and she followed suit.

"My Classes are mostly based on body enhancement skills. They make me faster, more resilient," Lilith said. "Come now, attack."

The machine moved, faster than Hadley had seen it move before. Her eyes could barely keep up, even with her perception skill in her second Class.

Six blades slashed into the healer but she too moved in a blur, back and away.

A loud noise resounded suddenly, Aki's movements stopped entirely. His blades were stuck in Lilith's skin, not very deeply. She held on to one of his blades with one arm.

"Defensive skills will help you resist damage but in the end every fight is just about who comes out alive," she said and twirled, dragging the machine with her before she threw it at the opposite wall, the steel slamming against stone with a loud crash.

*Her wounds healed already, how is she so strong?*

"If you have good Classes and train your skills up high enough, you'll be able to see enemy movements, sometimes even before they happen. You will have armor and projectiles at your side," she spoke, ash suddenly flowing over her body until she was fully covered.

Two horns jutted out of her head, pointing forward and towards the watching group. Limbs of ash formed behind her and fanned out, lances of ash appeared out of thin air and hovered close to her. The healer was gone, replaced by a warrior of ash.

"To defeat monsters, you will need strength, speed, mobility, understanding, any tool that might help you out. Something that all of you should know is that everyone makes mistakes. Us being healers, we won't need to worry about one or two. Missing limbs are just a part of the job. Losing a heart or even your head might not actually be a death sentence. Not anymore."

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"Together, we will find some Classes that will suit you. That will suit the Sentinels you are to become. The Sentinels that will be feared and respected, by both humans and everything else out there," Ilea said as she watched the people.

Aki was coming at her again. He really did become better.

She remembered him fumbling around in Balduur's forge. *She enchanted him, added padding.*

He was bigger, faster, more robust. His blades were deadlier. Perhaps he could even face a Centurion the way he was now. It was a bit of a stretch.

Ilea let him attack, his blades digging into her ashen armor without finding much purchase. She turned around and slowly grappled him with her ashen limbs, lifting him up before she turned him around on his head.

"The classes you take part in are a part of the puzzle. Combat training is another. I will take you through the process of acquiring resistances and potential achievements. If you want to get where I am or even higher, you will have to endure pain. You will have to watch your body get destroyed and reformed. Until it is a process as normal to you as breathing."

“I won’t force you to join and neither will I make you decide right now, right here. If at any point you think it impossible to continue, you can leave. I will get you an appropriate position in one of my businesses.”

“Now that everyone is here, can someone tell me how you can gain a Resistance?” she asked.

“You let an element damage your body,” one of the boys said.

It might be unfair to call him boy, the man was close to her own age. And still she felt older. Perhaps it was just the fact that she had seen Elementals, had survived the Ascended. He was a level thirty two mage, a prominent scar showing on his neck, extending to his shoulder. He was the one to understand who she was back in the main hall.

“What’s your name?” she asked.

“Nathan,” the man replied.

She liked the confidence. He was scared of her and still he spoke.

*We’ll make sure that you won’t be scared anymore soon enough. Of anything.*

“That’s correct Nathan. Can you tell me what the benefit of a healer is in all this?” she asked.

“They’re often used to help train warriors, defenders specifically. It means we can heal them while they take damage and level their defensive skills, including resistances,” he said.

“True. But you’re going to be healers yourself. Why train someone else when you can advance your own defensive capabilities?” she asked.

“Trian, would you help me out here?” she asked, smiling when the man appeared next to her.

“As some of you might know, Trian is a high level lightning mage. Not too common but you’ll encounter them from time to time, as well as creatures capable of using the magic. Anyone brave enough to take some damage?”

Nearly twenty people immediately lifted their hands.

“We’ll start with you three,” she said, pointing at the trio she had talked to before. All of them had lifted a hand.

She watched them approach and extended three ashen limbs, one to each of them. “I will heal you through these. It’s going to hurt... a lot.”

“Just one second Trian,” she said, “Ready?”

All of them nodded.

Sparks flowed, the three people screaming instantaneously. The farmer had bitten through his tongue, the cook sprained her fingers from clenching her fists. Nathan passed out.

Their health was topped off again a moment later.

“Well done. How did that feel?” Ilea asked.

The Farmer choked and spit out the piece of his tongue he had bitten off. “Fucking horrible!” he shouted.

“Third worst pain I’ve ever felt,” the cook said. “Can we do it again?”

*Could it be? One of my people?* Ilea asked herself.

“Name?” she asked the farmer.

“Luke,” he said.

Nathan woke up again, sitting up before he looked around, confused.

“How long until I get Pain Tolerance?” Celeste asked.

Ilea shrugged. “I have no clue. It won’t help massively at first either,” Ilea replied. “Everyone who wants to join can line up. One at a time until me or Trian reach capacity. If you don’t want to join, just stand back. This isn’t mandatory. Any questions you have, just ask away.”

Ilea spent the next three hours answering questions about resistances, healing magic, fighting, monsters, dungeons and many other topics. Most of the questions, she didn’t know the answers to but the experience of being electrocuted and healed helped the students tremendously to open up.

All of them chose to undergo the training, many tapping out but joining again. After half an hour, the first people reported acquiring Lightning Resistance. After one hour, the first instances of Pain Tolerance showed up.

Ilea made it clear many times that nobody had to undergo the training. She learned many names, forgetting most of them again quickly. There were mages, farmers, rogues even one enchanter. All of them would give up their Classes to get whatever showed up.

“I consider Heat, Ice, water, wind, pain, poison, and mental resistance some of the most important defensive abilities. We will focus on getting you as many resistances as possible. As well as any other general skills we can think of. Veteran being one of them...”

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Nathan focused on his hand, unable to hold the fork he was trying to grasp. It clang against the wooden table, as did many others.

“Just use your hands,” Celeste said, bringing the food to her mouth. Her hands too were shaking.

“She’s insane!” Luke exclaimed, trying to keep his voice down.

“I think I’m in love,” Celeste said with a full mouth. “I got Veteran, Pain Tolerance and Lightning Resistance. Can you fucking believe that?”

“We all got those skills...,” Nathan said in a whisper.

“Are you guys for real? We were just electrocuted for five hours,” Luke said.

“Yeah and it made us all stronger, without actually getting injured,” Celeste pointed out.

Nathan shook his head, leaving the fork as he too used his hands to eat. “We were injured. Again and again,” he touched his neck and swallowed empty.

“Are you guys already giving up? The benefits are obvious. You heard her. If we get more skills and learn about healing, we might get new unique classes,” Celeste said.

“Might. What if it’s all for nothing?” Nathan asked.

“I agree that it’s pretty nuts to go through this training but why would she suggest it if there is no point?” Luke asked.

“She likes other people in pain? It’s part of a ritual?” Nathan suggested.

“She is right,” a new voice said. Lorelai, the woman adjusting her braid as she sat down next to them. “Nobles do it to kids. Force them to go through horrible experiences to get rare classes.”

“That’s sick,” Luke said, his eyes opening wide.

“Yes. Yes it is. The difference is that we have a healer to take care of us that actually gives a shit. And we all have a choice,” she said.

“You really think she would let us leave?” Nathan asked. “We know who she is, what she’s doing here.”

Lorelai chuckled. “You have a very optimistic view of your own importance. Did you see how she took out Aki? It was effortless. It would take the Shadow’s Hand to do anything to her.”

“Trian has strong ties to the Hand, I’m fairly sure about that. They won’t give a fuck about some random low levels,” Celeste said. “I believe her. If you want to go, just go.”

“She seemed sincere to me as well,” Luke said.

Celeste scuffed. “To be fair, you have the people skills of a pig.”

“Hey, pigs have complicated emotions too. They’re very loving animals,” Luke said in a serious tone.

“Is he joking?” Celeste asked.

“No, they do show surprising emotion. Especially the younger ones. Appreciate your food.” Nathan said. “You think this has a point then?”

Celeste looked at her food and continued eating.

Lorelai nodded. “It takes courage and a shit ton of suffering but if I can get anywhere near what that woman is capable of, I’m happy to rip out my own arms to reach it.”

“Agreed,” Celeste said. “And it’s all free too. Even the Hand costs you a hundred gold and those are already level two hundred people.”

“That’s just a rumor,” Luke said.

“I have my sources,” Celeste said and looked away.

“Afternoons are going to be difficult,” Nathan said as he contemplated a piece of sausage. *Damn hand shaking. The lightning is gone, stop it.*

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“That went better than expected,” Ilea said. “I thought many wouldn’t want to go through that.”

Trian gave her a weak smile. “Most have been through worse.”

“You are absolutely crazy,” Lyza said and looked at her. “I don’t dislike it. Maybe I’ll join in too. My second Class sucks anyway.”

The faculty had gathered in their own hall in the third floor down. Warm magical lights shined from above as well as a bunch of oil lamps standing on various furniture.

“Any of you can join whenever I’m here. Or you can take the afternoons off,” Ilea said.

“We will finally have some time to prepare better lessons,” Sidney said. “Can’t believe I’m working for you now. You were so weak back then!”

“Hey, I nearly beat you, didn’t I?” Ilea winked.

The woman shook her head. “No way. Now I’m not sure anymore. Fuck... Adam was still around then, the son of a bitch.”

“He hasn’t shown himself since his disappearance,” Trian said. “I too suggest that while Ilea is here, we focus on working on our classes.”

“I’d like to sit in on some if possible. I’m pretty sure not all of them will want to continue the torture I put them through. Maybe they can become teachers in time or help you with all the administration work,” Ilea said, looking at Trian.

“That sounds like a good idea,” he replied.

“Where’s Aki by the way?” she asked.

“The Guardian is watching over our students, as well as this facility,” Orthan explained. “He is awake at all times, thanks to the enchantress.”

“I really need to talk to her about that. She made him quite dangerous,” Ilea said with a smile.

“More of him would be useful,” Lyza suggested.

“Sure. The problem isn’t the Guardian body, it’s the thing that animates him. A rare find and not one we can replicate, or can we?” Ilea said.

“She tried. And failed. The other project has priority,” Trian said.

“What other project?” Lyza asked.

“You didn’t tell them?” Ilea said.

“It is your decision,” Trian replied.

“You three are sure you want to stay here and work for us?” she asked.

“Most interesting thing I’ve ever done,” Lyza said. “Trian pays too well too. I don’t know how filthy rich y-”

Sidney cut her off with a hand to her mouth. “It’s fine. The pay is acceptable,” she said with a smile. “I like the students. I like teaching them how to fight. Not as arrogant as the Hand members. Now

that William and Claire evaluate most of the new members themselves, there is little for me to do. It's safe too and I like the freedoms we have. If you want to keep it that way."

Ilea shrugged. "I trust Trian to make those decisions. What about you?" she looked at Orthan.

"It was a surprise to learn that it was indeed you behind all this. I had thought Trian mad when he started talking of a healing organization. Still, it filled him with such passion I could not resist. We are still hidden here, the name protected. We owe you a great debt but it is not why I wish to stay, not the only reason at least. I believe it a noble goal, to train more independent healers. So many resources and people are wasted because the healing orders refuse to supply the adventuring guilds or the Hand, not that their priests would be much use out there." the man explained.

Ilea nodded. "Your expertise will be appreciated. Iana and Christopher are working to replicate a Taleen teleportation gate."

"Impossible," Orthan said immediately.

"Nothing is impossible, old man. Did you see her before?" Lyza asked.

"That is way bigger than I expected," Sidney said. "Well, I'll focus on teaching them the ropes of battle. A teleportation gate would be neat however. Just make sure we don't have Taleen swarming the city suddenly."

"Claire and Iana made sure the security is airtight. Even if the worst case happens, the city would be evacuated before much damage is done," Trian reassured them.

*I doubt that. If a bunch of Praetorians come through we'll have problems,* Ilea thought but didn't voice it. The rune master and enchantress were capable, maybe she could trust them on this. Otherwise Claire had her mark.

The test had showed it lasted two hours past using it up. Meaning that she had two hours to find her in case she calls for help. *Same with the Fae. Not a lot of fucking time if I'm half a world away.*

Ilea hoped it would improve as she leveled Sentinel Huntress.

"If you need any resources or creatures for your lessons, just let me know. I'm going to be out most nights and may be able to procure some things," Ilea said.

"Now that is interesting," Lyza said. "Do you have human corpses? I'd like some for my lessons."

Ilea nodded. "You can have mine. No head though."

"What?" Sidney asked.

"The head is the most interesting part," Lyza said. "But alright. If you find some, do let me know. For now, I'll take the rest of the body."

"Seriously, what?" Sidney said again.

Ilea slashed into her neck with a bunch of her ashen limbs, severing her head before she reformed her body, covered by her ash armor.

The limp part missing her head fell to the side before she caught it.

"Teleportation gate seems like a fine idea," Orthan said.

"Fucking nice," Lyza said and helped Ilea undress the body.

“Every time you get more ridiculous,” Trian murmured.

“By the gods, what level are you anyway?” Sidney asked.

“Trade secret,” Ilea said and looked at her corpse and then at Lyza. “No funky business with that thing.”

“I wouldn’t dare,” the woman deadpanned.

“Otherwise it’s your corpse and a new teacher next time,” Ilea said.

“Sure thing, boss,” Lyza said and rolled her eyes.