

## Chapter 905 Coffee

Ilea kissed Felicia and smiled, watching her fly off towards the central district of Virilya. *Back to work she goes.* Her bedroom had been added as another destination for Teleport, seeing how the return to Virilya had taken a few more steps without Felicia there.

Ilea sighed, wondering for a moment what her next step should be.

*There was one thing I wanted to check out.* She went through her anchors and found the one near Riverwatch. Focusing on it, she teleported and appeared on the hill overlooking the town. It was still nighttime, though she wondered about the time zones in Elos. Mostly in regards to the difference between the Courts and the Plains. So far, most of her travel had been north or southwards, not quite as much east or west, other than the Krahen Isles of course.

*Doing business with vampires must be fucking annoying too. Most everything shifted to the night. Though I guess they can still operate during the day, just with a roof over their heads.*

Looking at the distant forest beyond the city, she activated Teleport and appeared near where she had looked. Another teleport brought her far into the forest. Going higher into the air, she spotted the temple ruins two teleports later.

*And this journey took me entire days of running back in the day. Mere seconds now.* She looked at the temple and appeared on its roof, careful not to collapse everything with her weight as she landed.

The compass rose she had etched into the roof was still there. Faded slightly by the continued exposure to the elements. She smiled. *Didn't know a thing about this world back then.*

"The North," she murmured. "Arcane storms, Hallowfort, the Descent, Rhyvor, Maro, Scipio, Nes, and Garonoth." She used a small needle of black glass to etch a cloud with lightning next to the northern marker, then she turned.

"West," she spoke with a grin and pointed. "The Navali Forest, the Elven Domains, Audur, the Courts, the Mava, Orcs, and the Cursed Marshes." She tried her best to etch an elf and a vampire, both fighting. *Not the best artist. Would be fun to see Erik try and spin this in a positive light.* She smiled at the thought and turned.

"South. The Isanna Desert, the Foundation, an Earth Elemental, and the Sea," she spoke, trying to etch into the stone, the Foundation itself, as seen from kilometers away. *A mountain is easier than two people fighting,* she thought and turned eastwards, etching in the walls of Virilya as seen from a bird's view. "And East. Most of the Plains. Another continent perhaps? Still haven't checked that out either," she murmured, wondering if it was any different than the North. She no longer felt nearly as scared of crossing the ocean. But her current goal was something else.

Jumping down from the roof, she landed on the grassy earth with a slight impact. *Smooth,* she thought, before she started sinking into the ground. *Maybe not quite that smooth.*

Spreading her wings, she slowly flew into the forest. *Did I find the front of the temple? Or did I come from the side?*

*And how long did I travel?*

Ilea focused on Fabric Alteration and imbued her eyes with mana.

She was looking for an old tear.

What she found first, was a small bush with a familiar set of berries. She smiled and teleported a few of them into her hand. She ate one, reminded of the spicy taste.

***'ding' 'You have been poisoned by Cinderberry, you resist the poison.'***

"Yeah, I've had worse than you in the past years," she spoke, finding a creek in the forest. A Drake roared in the distance.

Her search continued for a few minutes until she came upon an overgrown set of bones. The surrounding trees felt familiar. As if etched into her mind. She shuddered when she remembered the sound of crunching bones, despite everything she had been through since. She remembered the confusion of arriving in a strange forest, dragons stalking their prey.

*I'm glad I didn't arrive in the territory of an actual dragon.*

She wondered how long she would've lasted. In the Navali forest, in the desert, in the North? She must've gotten really lucky. That or there was a magical explanation. Perhaps one based on level and mana density. Perhaps she would've never appeared in an environment that didn't support her? Cless too had arrived in the Plains. *But inside of a monster infested ruin.*

How many people had died within the first few days of arrival? Had there been people moved to Kohr? Or Erendar?

She slowed to a stop when she saw an anomaly in the fabric before her.

It was still there.

After all those years.

The space before her showed a thin fissure, only visible to her Fabric Alteration.

*Over seven years later, or was it eight?*

Ilea raised her hand and examined the tear. *This isn't like the one in Kohr.* She could affect it. Could change it. She stopped herself and teleported away, instead opening a gate to the North where she felt Meadow's telepathy connecting to her mind.

*"I found the tear,"* she said. *"The one that brought me here. It's still there."*

*"A connection to your old home. Is it open?"*

*"No. It's barely there anymore, but I know I can affect it. Do you think it's safe?"*

*"To open it? Yes. It would be no different than any other natural tear to another realm. I simply suggest you close it once again, when you're through. To make sure nothing else uses the connection. Do you want to go there?"*

*"It's been a while,"* Ilea said and sat down on the ground, crossing her arms. *"And you're sure nothing like in Erendar will happen? When you closed the gate there?"*

*"I'm as sure as I'll get without seeing the tear myself,"* the Meadow sent. *"But either way, you would feel that with your space magic ability once you start to open or close it. Just don't use too much force. You are a powerful being."*

*“Getting warned about my space magic prowess by the fucking Meadow,” she murmured in her mind. “I did want to visit. I guess I feel a bit scared now that I actually could, you know?”*

*“Are you scared of what could’ve happened?”*

*“It’s just been so long. It feels weird. I think I’m scared of not being able to come back here.”*

*“You have your anchors here. Not even I can hold you in one place anymore. And even if somehow, there was something there, that would prevent your return. This is Lilith we’re talking about. You will find a way.”*

Ilea smiled, then fell onto her back and sighed. *“What would I even do?”*

*“Well, now you’re just stalling.”*

She sat up again. *“You’re right. It was nice knowing you, in case I get stuck or this was all just a dream.”*

*“Self centered and ludicrously overconfident of you to think me a mere figment of your own small brain and its subconscious. Send me a message when you’re there,”* the Meadow sent.

Ilea stood up and opened a gate back into the forest. *“Will do.”*

She once more reached the old tear, raising her hand before she started to open it back up. *“The Meadow is right. I’m no longer the same person that arrived here, scared shitless.”*

She hadn’t done anything like this before but it felt easy compared to many of the Meadow’s puzzles. And it felt effortless compared to resisting the being’s magic, or teleporting away powerful spells. She stabilized and reinforced the phenomenon before the space in front of her shimmered with an active gateway. Two seconds after she had started.

She knew as well that it would collapse if she stopped affecting it.

*“Let’s go.”*

Taking in a deep breath, she spread her wings and flew into the shimmering light, knowing that the longer this gate stayed up, the higher the chance of something else drifting through.

Sunlight came in through the half closed blinds, illuminating the perfectly organized and clean room. A bed, perfectly made, with organized pink and white pillows. Several plants lined the top of a white chest of drawers, metal letters on the wall above read out Live, Laugh, Love.

This wasn’t her room.

She moved her wings, careful not to touch anything. There was nobody home. It wasn’t her room, but it had once been. *Rented out again,* she thought, looking at the neat little desk and the comfortable looking carpet.

It felt surreal.

The tear was still there, as was her magic. She could see the street below, could see into all the apartments within her domain. She could feel almost no ambient mana nearby. But there was some.

Nobody was home, so she turned and raised her hand once more, closing the gate. She continued and removed it from existence altogether, as if healing an old wound left within space itself. She kept looking at the wall behind where the tear had been, nothing left behind to indicate what had happened here many years ago, or what had happened here just now.

Looking at the floor, she didn't trust it to carry her weight. Instead, she checked the stairwell and teleported there, still flying. Luckily, her wings didn't exactly work like those of a bird, otherwise she would've ripped through the walls already. Another teleport brought her to the ground floor, where she finally landed and touched the ground.

Ilea took in a deep breath and touched the handle of the door leading outside. A familiar door. Simple and cheap. Just like her apartment had been. She deactivated most of her magic and looked down at herself. *Not quite the best.* She checked her clothing and decided on black pants and a shirt. The make didn't look modern, but she didn't want to draw too much attention with armor or her ash, either likely easy to explain with a possible cosplay hobby.

She focused on her mark on the Meadow, the feeling the same as when she was in Erendar or Kohr. *Just another realm,* she thought with a smile.

*"I arrived safely. The tear is gone as well,"* she sent.

*"Well done. Make sure to leave an anchor,"* the Meadow answered.

*I will do that, right,* Ilea thought and opened the door. She was glad now for all the practice in the past week, and she was glad that the ground outside was concrete and not soft earth. Still, she knew that a single misplaced step would crack the ground. She stepped outside and took in a deep breath of cold air.

Snow topped the roofs opposite her former home. Many of the cars too had a white cover. Electronic music played from a store down the street, farther away than she would've heard back when she had lived here. Two cars drove past. Looking up, she could see a plane pass overhead, far in the distance, and still, she could make it out with far more clarity than she ever could before.

*"Should wear a jacket,"* a woman said as she walked past, staring at Ilea. She wore a thick brown coat and a winter hat.

*Right. I'm supposed to be cold.* She looked at the woman's back and used identify.

**[Human] – [Cold]**

*No level.*

*I'm back,* she thought and started walking down the street, careful not to damage the floor or kill anyone on accident. *I kind of do want to throw around a few cars for the fun of it. Or have someone shoot me with a gun.*

The thought quickly vanished when she stopped in front of a store. *No money.* She saw the cash inside of the register and could've simply teleported some of it into her own pockets, but she decided not to. *Wasn't there a seedy exchange nearby?*

The streets smelled the same they always had. It looked to be late afternoon. Warm light came from a cafe nearby, one she had never entered before. *Too expensive,* she thought, looking at the menu. She smiled. *A coffee would be nice. Not Saaih tea, but actual coffee.*

She continued, feeling like a tourist discovering a new city, even though she knew this one well enough. Certainly not the most beautiful spot on Earth either, but it had once been hers. The years

hadn't changed it overly much either. Many of the products on the billboards were different ones, some she knew had higher numbers attached to them that indicated newer versions.

Electric cars and wireless headphones, high speed internet, and plant based fast food. Sure, the world seemed to have changed a little, but she didn't see advertising for teleportation gates or magic academies.

*Not yet.*

The exchange was still around. A small hallway within, a single counter at the end of it. Dim cold light illuminated the commercials and exchange rates plastered on the walls.

A bored middle aged man with unkempt hair looked up when she entered.

"Hey," she said, smiling at the realization that this was her first real interaction with a human from Earth in ages. And she chose this place. *I should've gone to Mark first. Oh well.*

"What do you want? Don't want to sit down?" the man asked, putting on his thin rimmed glasses. She could see the dirt on them in excruciating detail.

Ilea looked at the plastic chair in front of the counter and raised her brows. "Prefer to stand," she said. "Do you buy gold?"

"We do," he said. "Old jewelry? Price has not been the most stable."

Ilea could tell that was a lie. She smiled at him and summoned six coins into her pocket, placing them on the counter. "Family collection."

He grabbed the coins and looked them over. "I'll go check if these are real," he said and grabbed the coins, then closed the counter.

Ilea knew she would get fucked over, but she wanted cash, and this felt better than stealing. *The first Elosi coins in circulation. He might make a fortune.*

The main reason she came to this place was anonymity. Selling gold coins to a bank would likely not be possible without identification, and a woman who had disappeared seven years prior, only to come back and selling gold coins would likely raise some questions. Questions she really didn't want to bother answering.

Even if someone found out that she could cast magic, or had traveled back from another realm, what the Meadow had said was true. She doubted that anyone could hold her, but if what Erik had said was true as well, she could single handedly plunge the world into chaos by showing off her spells. She decided on a bit of discretion. For the time being.

It took ten minutes, but the man returned. "A thousand for each coin."

"One and a half," Ilea said.

He shook his head. "A thousand. Cash. No ID."

She wondered how bad the trauma would be if she spoke into his mind. It would be funny to freak him out a little, but compared to Elos where magic was a common thing, he might actually get fucked up from such a prank.

"Fine. A thousand," she said with a smile on her lips.

He opened a register, got the cash, and handed it to her, the coins staying with him. "Glad to do business with you."

"Sure," Ilea said with a smile and left, wads of cash in her inventory. *Now. A coffee. I do wonder if my stuff is still around somewhere.*

She grabbed a cup to go, very proud of herself to not have damaged any floors so far. The way to Mark's gym wasn't far, though she had to slow down to appreciate the true taste of coffee. *The Accords will soon have a new product to sell among the masses.*

With a happy smile on her face, she deactivated her domain and tread through the mushy snow, soon reaching the stairs leading down to the gym she had once known so well. And she was glad to find it was still there.

*Of course it is. He wouldn't give up his passion for nothing.*

She went inside whilst drinking from her coffee.

Music played from the radio. A track she hadn't heard before. The familiar sounds of people running on treadmills resounded from the right, and behind the broad counter in front of her stood Mark.

He remained bald, his black beard now showing a few gray strands. Somehow he looked even more buff than when she had last seen him. Nearly as big as Rock.

"I'll be right there," he said, focused on the computer screen before him. The same one she remembered. And he wore the same small reading glasses.

Ilea smiled and walked up to the counter, deciding not to lean on it. She crossed her arms. "Seven years, and you're still wearing the same set of shitty glasses."

He looked up, his eyes going wide. "I must be seeing ghosts."

"Hey, Mark," Ilea said. "Been a while."

"Ilea," he said. "You... no way. You didn't vanish like the others?"

She looked around. "Can we talk in the back?"

"Can we talk in the back she asks," he said and smiled. "Well. Yes, wait. Give me a minute," he said and went to find an employee, leaving the counter with the young man.

"Got people working for you now?" she asked.

"Not getting younger," he said and grabbed his jacket. "Coffee?"

"Sure," Ilea answered, finishing her cup.

Mark led her outside, and back into the building above.

"So all I had to do to see your place was vanish for seven years," she said with a smile.

He let her into the apartment, Ilea testing the floor before she deemed it structurally safe for her to traverse, though she didn't plan to sit on the couch.

She stood in the open kitchen and living room, the interior more practical than anything else. The walls were barren and there were no plants in sight. "No luck with dating?"

"Was waiting for you to return," he said in a dry tone.

“The long game. Well done. I’m not single anymore though, sorry to break your heart,” she said as he boiled water and leaned against the kitchen counter.

He crossed his arms and smiled. “All of my family plans. Shattered in an instant.” He paused. “You vanished. Like all those people.

“Where the hell have you been?”