

Chapter 606 Noble Things

“I didn’t exactly plan any of that,” Ilea said before she laughed.

Felicia smiled lightly. “I assumed as much. You’re an absolute monster but I’m glad you have help when it comes to managing your wealth and influence.”

“Me too, holy shit,” Ilea said and sighed, pushing herself back into the water. The tub was large enough to allow for a very short swim.

“There will be a lot of questions and offers coming your way at the ball tonight,” Felicia said after a while. “Want me to prepare you a little?”

“If you have time,” Ilea said. “I didn’t know it would be that big of a deal.”

Felicia smiled. “Every ball is a big deal. Especially when Lilith doesn’t show up to any. Though I suppose the best approach is to direct any requests to Ravenhall. Both to underline your loyalties and keep a healthy distance. If that is acceptable to you? I don’t know how close you are exactly with the Council.”

“I’m a member,” Ilea said. “So I guess sending requests there would be appropriate.”

“Impressive. That is not common knowledge. Maybe don’t mention that either. Loyalties are fine but if such a direct stake became known, your enemies might target the city itself. The same is true about your Sentinels but from what I hear, they’re more than capable of defending themselves,” Felicia explained. “May I take something?” she asked, standing close to the bar.

“Make yourself at home,” Ilea said, tensing up slightly when Feyrair appeared in the room.

He was covered in his scale armor, looking around before he joined Felicia at the bar. “A friend?” he asked.

“Yes,” Ilea said.

“An honor to meet you,” Feyrair said and bowed lightly. “Feyrair Kaa.”

“Felicia Redleaf, the honor is mine,” the woman said with a peculiar look in her eyes. She made herself a drink before she sat down on one of the couches. “A traveling companion?”

“You could say that,” the elf said, very carefully filling his glass with a clear liquid before he opened another bottle. He cut himself a piece of cucumber and added some pepper before sniffing on the mixture. “Do you want privacy?” he asked the two.

“She’s just briefing me on the ball,” Ilea said. “You can stay if you like.”

“I must say,” Felicia said, taking a sip from her beverage with her eyes focused on the elf. “You are most peculiar.”

“How so?” Feyrair asked, sitting down opposite the woman.

“Your magic is like nothing I have ever seen. I can feel something almost instinctual telling me to run. And I feel like you’re suppressing whatever is causing that,” Felicia said.

Did she figure it out? Ilea asked herself, unsure how the woman would react to the news. As far as she knew, Felicia didn't have direct history with Elves. Ilea trusted her but maybe not enough to outright share the nature of Feyrair.

"You're not human, are you?" Felicia finally said. When neither Feyrair nor Ilea replied, she continued. "A being from the North? Or perhaps from another realm?"

"I'll tell you if you want," Ilea said and meant it.

Felicia glanced at her and back to Feyrair. "It's alright. I don't want to pry into your affairs more than I already do. You're one of the few friends I have left. My political obligations and connections make it difficult to build anything sincere anymore. I didn't come here to profit from your power and connections. I came here because I wanted to see you," she said.

Ilea smiled. "Don't worry. I haven't forgotten the Felicia from back in the Iztacalum dungeon."

"You fought the Taleen?" Feyrair asked.

Felicia dropped her drink, her eyes going wide. "Oh no... Ilea are you crazy?" she hissed, looking between the elf and her friend. "You brought an elf into Yinnahall?" she whispered.

"Ah, she figured it out," Feyrair said and sipped on his drink. "Nice," he commented as he looked at the beverage.

"He's a Cerithil Hunter. Not associated with the Domains," Ilea said. "And he's not coming to the ball I decided."

Felicia looked at her with wide eyes. "You planned to bring him to the ball?" she shook her head before she used a few spells, wind flowing around her and her eyes glowing for a moment as she looked outside and down before she finally sat down. She got up again and walked to the bar again, remaking her drink with considerably more scotch. "I have an idea what a Cerithil Hunter is. My father documented his findings well. Though it seemed he didn't particularly like sharing any of it."

"The Taleen have been hunting down Elves for millennia. They're the few who enter the dungeons to fight them, the act of doing that causing them to be exiled from their Domains," Ilea explained.

"Elves don't enter dungeons. That's known," Felicia said. "It did confuse my father when he found his first Elven corpse in a Taleen ruin."

"I met one in the North some time ago. Became friends over time and he became a Hunter. Now I'm helping their group fight Taleen Machines," Ilea said. "And we're figuring out their gates."

"Father tried for decades, as did others. Did your new Class offer that much insight?" Felicia asked, downing her drink before she made another one. "Damn resistances," she murmured.

"Remember Meadow?" Ilea asked.

Felicia held up a hand. "Stop. Nonono. I don't want to hear it. Maybe in a few months, or a few years."

"Sure?" Ilea asked, smirking as she looked at the flustered woman.

"Yes. I'm sure. I have enough things to deal with as it is. And what I learned here is already a little much to process. Ilea, Velamyr is here. And I'm pretty sure other members of the Lily are present too, let alone other high level officials and Generals. If I thought he seemed different, I'm sure others could figure it out with ease. More so if they've fought Elves before," she said.

“We’re just here for another night. Don’t worry too much. What are they going to do? Accuse me of allying with Elves?” Ilea asked.

Felicia looked at her. “Yes... I mean yes. Don’t underestimate the hate some people have for his kind, no offense meant, but you did slaughter thousands of humans without reason. And not just in the past decade.”

“None taken,” Feyrair said.

Just Elves being Elves, Ilea thought and rolled her eyes.

He gave her a look but had the decency not to say anything.

“No I understand, Felicia. As I said he’s just here for another night and then we’re gone,” she said.

“So, want to go over the topics I should most certainly not touch on?”

“Yes. First, Elves,” Felicia started.

Ilea looked at the mirror in front of her and smiled lightly to herself. *Damn. That actually looks really good*, she thought.

“Come and show us,” Elaina shouted from outside the changing room.

She didn’t really need the room of course, owning several storage items and having plenty of experience with summoning or swapping clothes onto her body.

The two tailors had managed to bring life to the plans they had discussed. The dress was mostly black, going down in a long skirt that just barely reached the ground. Various openings allowed for her ash to flow in and slightly control the fabric without her having to use her hands. Various layers to the skirt made it look wavy, as if on itself it was already moving. Her ash added to the illusion, the very similar colors working in tandem to create a downright eerie look, as if the dress itself was a creature of shadow and ash.

Ilea was impressed how well the dress mimicked her ash both in color and texture. Both the long sleeves and the upper part of the skirt were decorated with fine embroideries that nearly faded. It would be hard to catch any details when she was moving even slightly. The tailors had been quite liberal with what they put on the dress, going from monsters to wings, to ravens. All however tasteful and abstract enough not to be immediately recognized.

Her shoulders lay bare but the dress didn’t show any cleavage. Elaina had even given her black silk gloves to wear. The last piece was a mask to cover the upper half of her face, black of course and contrasting well with her eyes. Runes were carved into the mask in silver, nothing that would correspond to any actual magic but simply drawn for their aesthetics. Ilea checked.

The mask flowed seamlessly into her hairline, the color fading until they became one, her open hair flowing down her back. Ilea tried adding some ash to her look, making thin lines that trailed after her in a ghostly fashion. *Perfect*.

She blinked outside and twirled gracefully. “How do I look?”

Elaina smiled, drinking from a cup of ale while Charlson squealed, clapping his hands together once as his smile broadened.

Felicia sighed, straightening her imperial outfit a little.

“You look magnificent!” Charlson said.

“I have to agree,” Felicia added.

“Could quickly touch your military thing up a little,” Elaina suggested to her.

Felicia looked at the woman before she glanced to Ilea.

“We have another hour,” she said in a mysterious tone. “We could go as wind and ash.”

Elaina downed her horn and cracked her neck. “Let’s get to work then,” she whispered.

The ball had been set up in the main government building of Yinnahall, near the very top of the city. An imperial banner covered a chunk of the building’s facade, next to it a banner that was likely representative of Yinnahall itself. Bowls of steel were distributed around the courtyard, fire burning within to light up the area.

Dozens of guests were walking towards the building, wagons of various designs carried by horses, oxen, and even Drake like creatures arrived in orderly fashion. Some of the guests arrived by flight, Ilea and her companion being two of them.

Guards stood at the entrance, both imperial and from the city itself, quickly checking the invitations and letting people inside.

They landed gracefully, ash and winds vanishing as if they hadn’t ever been present, the elements living on in their dresses in a subdued manner. Felicia had received an upgrade to her skirt, as well as gloves that were more in tune with her magic element.

The surrounding guests paused to look at the new arrivals, a man dressed in a suit gesturing them inside. “Lilith, and Major Redleaf. Welcome.”

No invitations needed, Ilea thought and stepped inside, already a little annoyed about the attention.

Felicia grasped her arm and smiled at her. “I won’t leave you alone, darling. This is my world,” she said and pulled her into the expansive hall. “You’ll like the buffet,” she added with a giggle.

Art of various styles covered the walls, massive windows letting in some of the fire and moon light from outside, large curtains in gray and red colors remained to the windows’ sides. Chandeliers provided magical light from above, their glittering brilliance either an intricate trick or caused by light magic enchantments. Musicians played gently in the background.

“Lady Lilith, of Ravenhall,” an excited female voice called out from near the entrance, the sound traveling through the hall like a wave, carried softly by the sound magic she invoked. “Major Redleaf of Lys.”

Over a hundred faces glanced their way, some returning to their conversations more quickly than others. Felicia had informed her that it would be inappropriate for someone to come up to them immediately, which left them some time to position themselves in the hall and find a group to join.

Ilea spotted a few familiar faces. Velamyr being one of them, the General locking eyes with her for a short moment before he returned to his conversation. Benedict, the former Order of Truth healer was present too, bowing visibly when she walked past about ten meters away.

She smirked when she saw Nicholas, the divination mage she had saved from Maria. He definitely didn't want to be there. Everyone looked official, proudly presenting their polished and sheathed weaponry and shiny embroideries. A few even wore medals. Ilea stood out more than she had expected with her near fully black dress. Only the imperials going for gray came close, most however making sure to add a bright dash of red into the mix.

'ding' 'Identify reaches lvl 20'

The notification was welcome, just another level needed to finally reach the second tier. And if she tried to identify every single pastry and beverage laid out on the massive buffet tables, she would likely be close already.

Felicia luckily led her exactly there, only a few people currently helping themselves to anything.

"It's generally seen as a statement not to eat anything, both a declaration of wealth and power," Felicia explained.

"But it's warm now," Ilea said and grabbed a plate, putting a few of the pastries onto it. "A terrible waste."

"I doubt it's going to be thrown out afterwards," Felicia mused.

Ilea noticed one of the employees glancing at her, his whole body tensing up when she looked back. His gaze went straight forward. *New rumors to spread. Well I don't mind introducing actually eating from the buffet to nobility culture.*

"Ah fuck," she whispered, biting into a croissant filled with saucy bacon, her sphere spotting a familiar face.

The man didn't yet approach but he glanced over for a split second.

"Not to your liking?" Felicia asked, taking a glass from the table and pointing to one of the wine bottles before an employee poured it for her.

"No, I just saw Michael," Ilea said.

Felicia smiled. "He's already here? That's good."

I still have his notes, Ilea thought. She had totally forgotten about them. "How is that good?"

"I haven't seen him since then. I think another thanks is appropriate. He did save my life after all," Felicia whispered.

"You just want to set up deals with Kroll," Ilea whispered with a sigh, eating more of the pastries.

"Of course. I came here for fun after all," Felicia said.

Ilea huffed. "Sure. I remember you talking about buying a farm and getting away from... well exactly this."

Felicia smirked, sipping on her wine as she looked at her. "Oh, but Lilith. Back then I didn't know the joys of seeing my enemies bereft of their assets and power. I was afraid of who I could be."

Ilea swallowed, closing her eyes as she enjoyed the taste. “You just brought me here to be seen with Lilith.”

“A side benefit, I won’t lie,” Felicia said. “Coincidental however, though it made this endeavor much less dreadful than it would’ve been without you. And don’t worry, I’ll keep the vultures off your back.”

“Because you’re already clawed deep within it,” Ilea said with a smile.

“Exactly. I’ll screech at them with noble impunity,” Felicia answered.

The music slowly picked up when the first people approached the two.

“Lady Lilith,” Velamyr greeted. “I’m thrilled to see you well. My thanks again for your service to the Empire. Major Redleaf.”

“General,” Felicia said.

“The addition to your uniform suits you well,” the man said before he turned to Ilea. “I hadn’t expected to see you here today, but I suppose it makes sense. Your associates are quite capable in their dealings.”

Who Meadow, Claire, Isalthar, or Catelyn?

She assumed he meant Claire due to her being involved in the Yinnahall business. “They are indeed,” she answered. “I’m glad to know the war is over.”

“And many thousands of lives were saved through your efforts,” Velamyr said. “I shall leave you to your conversation. Enjoy the festivities,” he said with a slight smile.

“He wants you,” Ilea whispered when he had vanished into the crowd.

Felicia sipped on her wine again. “It would be a favorable alliance.”

“Oh don’t tell me you’re considering a relationship for political power,” Ilea said.

“There is no shame in a few misters, or mistresses,” Felicia mused.

Ilea rolled her eyes and continued to stuff herself with the terribly neglected baked goods.

Felicia protected her for the next two hours, Ilea forgetting dozens of names after seconds of conversation, the information simply irrelevant to her. All deals were referred to Ravenhall, all praise and thanks was received with a smile. It was surprisingly exhausting, Ilea finding herself using meditation and even healing. Felicia on the other hand seemed to get more lively as the evening went on.

“Fresh air?” Ilea asked after a while.

Felicia smiled and led her outside, her form cutting through the crowd like an icebreaker through the frozen hellscape of the Great Salt.

They arrived in the courtyard and garden, fire mages tending to the flames. The winds had picked up a little, making their job a little more active.

Ilea sighed, sitting down on a stone railing. “You saved me, oh brave knight,” she said, leaning back slightly.

“Sitting down on stone, not very lady like of you. I’m not sure if I will court you after all,” Felicia said.

“I think I can make the dress out of pure ash by now,” Ilea said.

“And be naked below? How scandalous,” Felicia mused.

“Verily,” Ilea said and summoned herself a bottle of ale, flicking it open with her gloved thumb.

“A sight to behold,” Michael said as he stepped up to them, himself wearing an overly golden doublet. “The legendary Lilith, sitting down and drinking ale like some common adventurer.”

“You’re not the real one, are you?” Ilea asked. She assumed Michael himself wouldn’t be quite that direct.

“Oh? Did I give myself away? I must’ve spent too much time among nobility. Dreadful, really. I would’ve much rather hunted down a beast or spent my limited days with research,” he said. “But I’m not here to waste your time and energy anymore than it has already been taken. A deal was made, I remember. Do you have anything for me?”