

## Chapter 739 Card Tricks

Lily woke up when the cart came to a sudden halt, the roads more rocky now that they had reached the southern parts of Lys. Forests were fewer here, as were lakes and rivers. She didn't like it. The trees could hide her and her pack more easily. They allowed her to hunt.

She glanced at her father, bald now with a thick beard. She supposed it suited him. He still refused to wear a shirt, the scars from his youth on display for everyone to see. It created some issues. Last week she had to bribe one of the drivers to let them join the caravan, the guards not wanting a level one thirty berserker to join, not with the way he looked. And smelled. The latter should really bother her more but with his occasional nightly disappearances, she could at least find him easily.

The cart had stopped entirely. *We shouldn't be there yet.* She checked the black knife fastened to her makeshift leather belt. Then she grabbed the Alpha Hound's trinket wrapped around her arm and used it to bind her wild black hair. The length was becoming a bit of a problem but it grew so fast she didn't bother cutting it. Lily assumed it had to do with her canine tamer class, the transformation far more powerful since her evolution at level one fifty. As were the changes to her body. Her nails were growing faster too, and people noticed. A good thing, she supposed. In the end it hardly mattered how the two of them looked. With the right amount of coin, they could manage. And stealing from the extra rude merchants was not only exciting but cathartic as well.

The nice beige shirt and pants she had bought in Vihal were already getting dusty but it would be enough to enter the tournament without issue. Adventurers were attending after all, and many of them didn't exactly look ready to enter a king's hall. *Plus beggars aren't close to level one seventy.*

She heard voices outside, guards calling out with an uncertain tone. She stood up and kicked her father's leg. "Roland. Wake up. Something's happening."

The man grunted, his eyes opening wide before he took in his surroundings. He grabbed for the axes usually fastened to his belt but found nothing there.

"Guards... right. Do you want to go see?" he asked.

Lily ignored him and jumped out the back of the wagon. She looked around before moving into the shadow, coming out behind a cart. The suns were high on the horizon, ocean air mixing with dust. She climbed up the back of the cart to see, a group of guards gathered to the left of the thirty wagon long caravan.

*Just two men. Look rough,* she thought, checking the surroundings to see if there was more to it. They didn't look like bandits, nor would she think anyone stupid enough to attack this close to Morhill. There were bound to be military escorts around, perhaps even Shadows.

"I told you, I'm Jyrai, fire sage performer. We're on our way to Morhill," one of the men said. He wore battered leather armor and looked both tired and dirty. He smelled the part too.

The other one looked worse, and he was a drunk. Something about him put her on edge. Black hair and eyes, two swords strapped to a belt, barely hanging on. The blades didn't look sharp and the man staggered just trying to stay upright. And still, her instincts told her he was the most dangerous one around.

"Eight silver coins if you want to join," one of the guards said. "Bale, you got space right?!"

Lily sighed. *Wagon of rejects it seems. The smell is gonna be horrible.* She glanced to the side and jumped off, moving through the shadows once more before she teleported into a merchant's wagon. The one who had hired the laziest guard. Joyre was his name and he was currently asleep with his head resting against a large chest. *At least he's protecting that.* Lily didn't want to bring attention to herself or her father, and too much stealing would quickly lead the guards to suspect them. So she took a single bar of soap only.

Back out, she returned to their wagon, the thing half filled with potatoes. Covered by a tarp, to protect the vegetables of course. Why Bale thought Morhill was in dire need of potatoes was a question she didn't dare ask. It was the cheapest cart after all, and the only driver who accepted them. She threw the soap to her father who caught the thing and looked at it. "A welcoming gift to our new traveling companions."

He raised a brow and leaned back against the wooden bar.

*No comment. Nothing.* She didn't mention it. At least he wasn't slowly degenerating anymore. Still, she was getting tired of taking care of him. *Is that why I'm here?* She shook her head. She was here to join a tournament, to fight people that could teach her something, to win coin. To buy equipment, from a smith she could trust.

Chatter came from outside, the two men she had seen before led towards the cart.

"They'll give your swords back once we're there. Come on, do you really want to walk all the way?" one of them said, the same she had heard talk before.

"Eight silver for that distance is ridiculous, and there's no need to take my weapons," the other said.

A guard appeared, a tired look on her face as she gestured for the two to go up. She glanced at Roland. "You're getting two more. It's just another six hours or so."

"That's fine," Lily said instead. She grit her teeth at the woman's look. Pity. Little she hated more. A growl resounded as her shadows threatened to attack.

The woman's eyes opened wide as she took a step back.

"Shadow summoner. Nice Class, girl," the weaponless drunk said as he climbed up without a care in the world. He plumped down at the back and nodded to Roland. "What's with you?" He turned to her. "Mute?"

"Doesn't talk much," Lily said and shifted away from him. He knew something about her magic. Few did.

"Sorry for bothering the two of you. We had a..." the other man said and sat down next to Roland. "Rough journey," he sighed and rubbed his eyes. "Gods I'm glad we're finally close." He looked up to see Roland hold out the soap. "You must be knowledgeable in divination magic. Thank you, friend. What's your name?" the man said and took the soap. "Now to find water. I'm Jyraiui by the way."

"Roland," her father said.

"There's an old woman three carts down. Low level water mage. She takes pity on people who look like you," Lily said.

**[Fire Mage – lvl 166]**

She glanced at the other man.

**[Sword Master – lvl 226]**

*No wonder he seemed dangerous. Adventurer?*

“I don’t need a fucking bath,” the man said.

“Yes you do,” Lily said and stared at him.

He quirked up his brows and stared back. “Tough one, are you?”

She didn’t reply.

“Don’t glare at her,” Roland said, his teeth grinding.

“Berserker going to be mad? She your slave? Your daughter? Picked her up on the road out of pity?” the man asked.

“Stay out of it,” Lily said. *Stop defending me. Stop protecting me.*

Roland looked down.

The drunkard whistled.

“Edwin. Please. You stink,” Jyrai said and held out the soap.

“Fucking Alyris’s shiny ass, you absolute pansies,” Edwin growled and grabbed the soap. He jumped out and nearly fell under the horses pulling the next cart.

“You stink too,” Lily said.

“Oh I know. Trust me I was looking for that soap,” Jyrai said. “I’ll go after. Sorry about him. He’s an absolute shit.”

“Why travel with him then?” Lily asked.

“It pays well. And certain... opportunities may come up,” the man said and gave her a hint of a grin.

Lily didn’t get it. Nor did she care much. So she stayed silent.

“Joining the tournament as well?” Jyrai asked.

“Oh by the gods,” she murmured.

“Alright. Not one for conversation. I get it. Crowds these days are not the same, I tell you,” the fire mage said with both hands raised.

Soon it was his turn to go clean up.

Edwin dripped with water when he came back. He didn’t speak a word and just watched Roland.

“You look angry,” Lily said after a while.

“I thought you didn’t like talking,” he said.

*You heard that?*

She didn’t add to what she said.

The man glanced at her and whispered. “You’ve been snooping around. I’ve seen your kind. Know if anyone has Amber Pearl?”

“I don’t know what that is,” Lily answered.

“Dark red bottle, round, three snakes on it. From Virilya,” he said.

“Haven’t seen it,” Lily said.

“Country merchants, fuck,” Edwin said and looked back at Roland. “What the fuck happened to us. Huh? You want to fight?”

Roland leaned forward, his muscles tensing.

*Why*

Jyraiu jumped in and wedged himself past between the two men. “I got some soap left. They lady was really nice. Thanks for the suggestion. I also bought a card game we can play.”

Roland was back to his apathetic self.

And Edwin had a new target. “You don’t have any coin to bet.”

“Don’t need coin to play a game of cards,” Jyraiu said as he shuffled, the cards moving in a mesmerizing way as he smiled and glanced at Lily. Sparks of flame started to dance around the deck but his magic was cut short when Edwin slapped his hand into the spectacle.

“Why are you all like this?” Lily asked and vanished. She could walk the rest of the way, or run.  
*Miserable. Old. Fucking. Men.*

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Ilea watched the approaching caravans. The main road leading up into the mountains was chock full of travelers. *And that with the festivities already started.* The tournaments wouldn’t begin for another day. She glanced at a group of black winged Sentinels in the distance, landing to fight off a group of Harpies. *Having so much fun against such weak creatures. Ah how I miss the day.*

She looked around, Morhill on the other side of the mountain, the distant city bustling with activity. No four marks had come to attack so far. No demons had been summoned. No Elves had attacked. And Ilea feared it would stay that way. *Well. At least nobody will die. Except some in the tournaments if they go too far.* She sighed. Going back to Karth wasn’t really an option for now. The food was good but the streets were a little too packed for her comfort. She was looking forward to watching the tournaments but that would take some time.

A Sentinel landed nearby. “Lady Lilith. The Head administrator has summoned you.”

“For what?” Ilea asked.

“A resistance training event,” the Sentinel said.

“Really?” Ilea asked.

“It’s... what I was told,” he said. “The main arena.”

Ilea sighed with a smile, spreading her wings and flying off towards the grand structure. She landed a moment later, seeing Claire with a large group of adventurers.

“Did you read my mind?” Ilea asked.

“I saw you in that hall. No wonder so few approached you. Come, we have to test the dwarven barrier dome. The rune combinations are interesting but it requires a lot of skill to pull that off. Also we will dance at the ball in two days. I won’t accept a no,” Claire answered and waved to a war machine in the distance.

He activated a set of runes, a yellow tinged barrier forming above the sand covered stone grounds.

“Alright, have fun everyone,” Claire said. “I have to get back to deal with requests. It’s gonna be a long week.”

“Thanks for all the work. And for providing this. I’ll be happy to show off my shit dancing skills,” Ilea said.

“If it can stop a few of your attacks, we’re good,” Claire added and gave the dwarf a thumbs up.

The crowd looked at her before they started murmuring amongst each other.

Ilea whistled, freezing most of them. “Alright. I’m your target. Don’t hold anything back,” she said as her ash armor receded slightly.

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The suns had vanished behind the mountains when the caravan finally reached its destination. Half the slope was full of wagons, people arguing about where to set down their carts and where to move their wares.

Lily didn’t care about that. She had already left behind the caravan and walked towards the walls a few hundred meters ahead. They seemed to protect most of the valley. Not what she had heard about the city at all. She turned around and sighed. “Why are you following us?”

“Does there have to be a reason?” Jyrai asked.

“It’s easier to get in as a team of adventurers. Fewer questions and no individual names,” Edwin said.

“Two people is still a team,” she said. Roland was of no help of course.

“Miserable cunts might work as a name?” Edwin suggested.

“Come on, I did win most of the games,” Jyrai said as he smiled at her. He glanced at Edwin for a long moment and opened his mouth, closing it again.

“Don’t be such a shit. You two are downright feral. How will you even get a room?” Edwin asked.

“I won’t. I’ve slept in the wilderness for years,” Lily said.

The man simply ignored her. “Come on. Let’s call ourselves the Amber Pearl.”

Lily opened her mouth and stared at the man, watching his back before she turned to Jyrai. “We’re not g-”

The man got close and crouched down to meet her eye. “Please. I don’t know what it is. But he... he hasn’t acted like this since I met him. I’ll pay you. Well. If you just play along. You still get to go to your tournament and everything.” He got out a pouch of coins and handed her five silvers. “Just for today.”

Lily squinted her eyes at him, then grabbed the money. “I will kill you two if you try anything strange.”

“I’ll kill him first if he does,” Jyrai said, then bobbed his head slightly. “I’ll need your help though, I think. If it comes to that. He’s very durable.”

She sighed and waved to Roland. “We’re going with them.”

Her father looked at the dark horizon for a while before he turned her way, then nodded.

Guards in black stood at the gate, two dozen of them in various gear. Battle healers were present too. Sentinels. They checked the newcomers and let them pass, groups of them gathering around certain people from time to time. Lily and the others waited behind Edwin.

“Amber Pearl, adventuring team out of Virilya,” he said when they reached the front. “Been a long journey, Shadowguard.”

“You’re quite a bit higher than the others,” the man said.

“Hard to find reliable people these days,” Edwin said with a sigh. “What they lack in power, they make up in being reliable.” He glanced around and nodded to some of the other guards. “Good formation. I’m sure you understand what I mean.”

The guard grinned. “Yeah. Well, good luck in the tournaments.”

“How’s the competition?” Edwin asked.

*We’re in. What are you doing?*

“I won’t lie. Your chances don’t look good,” the guard said in a more quiet tone. “And you can’t join the pre two hundred one with you in the team.”

“That popular, huh. Everyone heard of Lilith, it seems,” Edwin said and laughed. “We’ll try anyway. Might get a few eyes on us.”

“Good luck either way,” the guard said and motioned them through.

“Thanks. Any inn suggestions?” Edwin asked as he walked past.

The man laughed. “For that you’ll need more than luck.”

It turned out Edwin didn’t need luck.

He teleported past a cellar door and opened it from the inside. “Come on. Better than outside.”

Lily glared at him but Jyrai pushed both her and Roland into the cellar, the door closing behind them.

There was no light inside, not until a flame erupted from the man's fingers.

"I hear people above," he said.

"Yeah. But they don't use their cellar much," Edwin said, moving his hand across a dusty shelf. "Let me go talk to them."

"Why?" Jyraiou asked in a terrified voice.

"Because those fucking mini Ileas are going to see us down here. What do you think. We'll need permission to stay, and I'm not sleeping in the fucking snow," Edwin said.

*Ileas?*

"Who is Ilea?" Lily asked.

Edwin looked at her and raised a brow. "Interesting."

She took a step back.

"I don't care that you know her. She's always been naive and open," he said.

"She saved our lives," Lily retorted. "And she was nice to me."

"Good for you," Edwin said. "I'll get us permission." He vanished.

Jyraiou found a lantern in his pack and ignited some oil within. "You met her then? Lilith I mean."

"I don't think she called herself that back then," Lily said and sat down on an old wooden chest.

Roland sat against the stone wall and closed his eyes.

"Edwin met her too. Helped her train I think. He claims she was weaker than him back then," Jyraiou said.

"Don't think he could train anyone," Lily said. She could believe the latter part. Ilea hadn't been much stronger than her father when they first met in Riverwatch. She had known as much. A few months later she had shot past him in power. And now she was known throughout the Plains. As Lilith, but to her it wasn't much of a conclusion to come to. You don't forget people like her.

"They want silver," Edwin said.

"We're not going to have much left," Jyraiou said.

"Then go bother my sister. She's in the city too, I'm sure," Edwin said.

*His sister? Is that... the opportunity?* Lily glanced at the fire mage.

"She won't be happy to see me," he said with a sigh.

"Then bother Aliana for all I care. Or ask the great Lilith who's happy to help everyone," he said, glaring at Lily for a moment.

"Fuck you," she said and walked out, slamming the door behind her. *Now where do I sign up for these tournaments.*