

Chapter 514 Seeking the Faithful

“I don’t have an issue with you if what you said is true. Soon your slaves will be free however,” she said.

His heart rate increased. “It’s true... you’re the one from the songs. The one to defend Riverwatch.”

He got up and paced through the room. “Then perhaps you speak the truth after all... do you have proof?”

Ilea spread her wings and smiled. “Proof for the ritual? No. But you know that the cities were wiped out, their people turned into monsters. I’ve seen them, fought them. Is the Empire capable of that?”

“Of course they are but you’re right. Nara doesn’t make sense. Lys is not known to push so far, so quickly, nor should they employ such destructive blood magic. It took them so long just to break the siege of Virilya,” he said. “And with the High King... what are they planning?”

“You’re pretty well informed,” Ilea said and chuckled.

“Of course I am. My life might depend on it. Are you certain the Order is behind these rituals?” he asked.

“I have second hand information but I’ve seen the halls, the Cursed clad in robes. Someone would have had to infiltrate and take over the various temples, set up a complicated ritual, all under the nose of the nobility, the Order, the guard? Plus in Nara, apparently the nobles were told about it too. They left beforehand,” she said.

He touched his hair with both hands before he sighed. “Alright... I believe you, Lilith. If only because it seems to be the most logical explanation. What do you need from me? Potions? Contacts?” he asked, starting to look through the cabinets.

“You talked about members of the Order who helped out the slaves for free... I doubt someone like that would support what the Order at large is doing. They might not even know about it, or it’s just a fringe group that plans the rituals... I doubt that however, with how extensive they were,” she said.

“It’s possible... in that case you should speak to Acolyte Benedict. He lives in this district, a fifteen minute walk. I don’t think he would be in the temple at this hour,” he said. “If anybody I know can point you in the right direction, it’s him.”

He grabbed a piece of paper and started sketching down a small map with his shop at the center. His hand was trembling slightly.

“I told you, I won’t kill you. Just forget about this meeting after we’re done,” she said.

He finished before saying anything, handing her the piece of paper. “You’re just the first to make it into the city. Troops from Nipha have already shown their presence and more are on the way. I fear what will happen to Yinnahall, no matter if your words were the truth or not. I fear what will happen to me and those I hold dear.”

“You seem decent enough... hmm... hey are there any mentions of Lilith from the siege of Virilya?” she asked.

“I’m not aware of any,” he said. “Most of the soldiers did not return. And your name is not uttered in the open.”

“Then maybe it’s time to add a little fuel to my reputation...,” she said.

“What did you have in mind? If your name can prevent some of what’s to come, I’ll gladly assist you,” the man said.

“You’ll have to spread a few rumors,” she said with a grin.

Ilea hoped her assessment of Yinnis hadn’t been wrong. A single person talking to the wrong people could cause a lot of trouble in regards to the ritual. She wasn’t versed in stealth, infiltration, or information gathering however, nor were any of her skills particularly helpful in this endeavor.

If she kept refraining from torture that was. The thought made her remember the noble in Nara, her treatment of him perhaps too harsh. A single punch to his face might have been enough. She didn’t overly regret it but reminded herself to stay aware of her power. Not to end up like Hector or his younger self.

She bought a few meat skewers from a street vendor who accepted her copper without asking any questions.

Yinnis’ map was enough to lead her to Benedict’s house. She would have likely stumbled upon it with loose directions too, seeing the many sick, injured, or starving people waiting in front of the door.

Ilea didn’t bother trying to speak to them, instead checking for guard patrols, soldiers, or otherwise troublesome people in the nearby streets. Nobody immediately dangerous seemed to be around.

She wordlessly stepped into a close by dark alley, summoning casual clothes and a cloak to cover a part of her face.

A kid sitting nearby rubbed his eyes as he watched her.

Ilea raised a finger to her mouth before checking him with her ash. He stuttered something in the native tongue but she had already healed his minor cuts and bruises, handing him a few silver coins.

“Lilith,” she said and stepped out into the street again. No guards or soldiers had turned up. She quickly walked to each person waiting, summoning a silver coin and healing them with a casual touch. Most were below level forty, the process near instant.

Nearly all of them were lost for words, looking at the silver in their hands before they hid it or rushed off, saying a few words to her that she didn’t understand.

Ilea had to shoo a few people away after they either tried to thank her excessively or begged for more.

One of the last people she healed and gave silver to asked her something in a calm voice. A few of her ribs had been cracked.

Ilea continued without saying anything.

“Who are you stranger?” the woman asked again, in Standard.

Ilea healed the last patient. “Lilith,” she whispered, loud enough for the woman to hear.

“Our thanks to you, Lilith, giver of life,” the woman said. “You should be careful in these streets. Charity is met with greed, envy, and suspicion.”

Ilea just nodded, smiling at the thought of thugs trying to mug her. She assumed the authorities wouldn't exactly like her actions either but doubted anybody with a new piece of silver would report her. If someone envious did it, she assumed at least that nobody would investigate for the coming half hour or likely much longer.

The door opened and a young woman with white hair and deep red eyes glanced out. She said something in the native tongue looking at Ilea.

[Healer – lvl 32]

A simple brown robe covered the woman.

Ilea didn't reply, not knowing what was said to her.

The healer looked past Ilea before slamming the door shut.

Not fast enough.

Ilea had already blinked inside, amused by the enchantments flashing to life behind her.

"I was told this is where a certain Acolyte Benedict resides. Can you show me the way?" she asked.

The woman staggered back a few steps, nearly falling before she caught herself. "Who are you? What did you do to the hopeless?"

"The hopeless? You mean the people outside?" Ilea asked.

The woman seemed slightly irritated. "Of course."

"I'm not from around here," Ilea said with a smile. "I healed them."

"All of them?" the woman asked, her heart beating faster.

"Of course," Ilea said.

"Are you here to kill him, kill us?" the woman asked again. She seemed more defiant now, her body tense and ready to do, something.

"That depends. I'm here to talk first and foremost," Ilea said. "You better show me to him though, I'm in a bit of a rush."

The woman gulped and nodded. "Follow me," she said and led Ilea through a door in the back of the large entrance room and then down into the cellar.

Ilea already noted the enchantments, some of them familiar as noise canceling and anti teleportation spells. She didn't expect much from this place however, casually displacing a pebble up into the hall above just to make sure she could escape. The spell worked flawlessly.

The girl stopped in front of a thick reinforced wooden door, knocking in an obvious pattern.

Ilea's sphere wasn't stopped by any of the enchantments, letting her see the four people inside scramble into a defensive position. Two women and a man with a variety of weapons standing in front of a desk and the man sitting behind it.

Benedict I hope, Ilea thought. The anti teleportation enchantments would work in her benefit this time. She just had to make sure they wouldn't disable them. Just in case the talks didn't go in the right direction.

Ilea checked the rest of the building, finding about a dozen people working on different things, nothing out of the ordinary. Two patients with missing limbs were resting in beds in the second

floor, what seemed like a nurse was talking to them as she cleaned a few pieces of cloth under running water.

“That was a little obvious,” Ilea said to the girl.

She shied back, holding her arms in front of her defensively.

Ilea laughed for a few seconds before gesturing her to enter. “Come on, you go in first.”

She didn’t say anything but entered immediately, running to the three armed and armored people. She stumbled and fell, helped up by one of the women with a stern look on her face, an angry glance towards the intruder.

Ilea stepped inside and used Force to close the door behind her, a few more enchantments snapping into place.

[Warrior – lvl 103]

[Warrior – lvl 111]

[Warrior – lvl 83]

[Healer – lvl 120]

The man behind the desk looked tired, an uncertain expression on his face as he assessed the newcomer. His eyes were a dark brown, his hair shaved off flawlessly. A broad jaw and thick black brows were the major defining features of his face, his clothes just simple robes like the girl’s.

The warriors were clad in somewhat high quality armor. Simple steel but well made. The mace, hammer, and falchion were held with casual ease, their muscles tense, and their heart rates calm.

Ilea spread her arms. “You must be Benedict. I’m happy to make your acquaintance.”

The healer girl said a few things to the others in the native tongue, the words leading to some obvious confusion.

“Welcome to my house and study, healer. I had not expected a visitor today and yet I can only assume your reasons to be well founded. It’s rare to be visited by such a high ranking member of another Order,” he said in Standard.

A few questions in there, and information for his protectors, she thought and smiled. Ilea didn’t plan to lie or deceive. Their weapons and magic were nothing to her, should they refuse to cooperate, she would simply cut them down. With Yinnis, she was reasonably sure he wouldn’t rat her out but now she was in much riskier territory.

“They are. As to your implication, I’m not a member of an Order at all. I’ve heard a few things about you that made me interested in seeing you,” Ilea said.

“You come here, claiming to have healed all those seeking treatment, break into my house and my office. You must be aware of the connections I have. If you seek assassination, then I suggest you leave this city and get a new contract,” he said.

Does he really think he has the upper hand here? Ilea thought. Even a mere Shadow would rip them apart with ease.

She charged monster hunter and focused on her name before talking. “Benedict,” she said as the spell rushed through the room, freezing everyone in place. She added Force to the mix on everyone but the healer himself.

His eyes opened wide as he remained frozen for a few seconds.

“As I said. I’ve heard a few things about you that made me interested,” she said again and walked to one of the warriors, the woman moving her pupils to look at her as she touched the edge of her blade. “Why were so many of them waiting outside? Can you not take care of them near instantly?”

She assumed even the level thirty girl could have healed everyone in an hour or two.

He gulped and looked at the others, finding himself able to move again. He wisely decided to remain in his chair.

Ilea switched her attention to the mace, taking it out of the man’s hands before she twirled it around a little, locking eyes with the terrified warrior.

“There are consequences for overstepping certain rules. I can’t offer free unrestricted healing to everyone who seeks it. We have to make sure a slave’s owner allows for healing and we have limits as to how many we can treat,” Benedict explained. “If you really are Lilith then I ask you to let them go, they’re loyal guards. You’re after me and I swear to cooperate if you don’t harm them.”

Ilea smiled at him. “It’s nice that you think of them first. If you can promise me that they don’t attack immediately after I let them go, I’ll do so. They must remain in this room however. For obvious reasons.”

“You heard her. Stand down and don’t interfere,” Benedict immediately said.

Ilea released Force, still twirling the mace around.

The three people immediately went closer to the man, ready to interfere if she attacked. The man without a weapon looked a little awkward without his mace.

“Why the limitations?” Ilea asked, throwing the weapon up before catching it again.

“The reasons are different and often complex. If you’re unfamiliar with local customs and our culture it would take time to explain. Simplified, it’s the same reason slavery is allowed in this country. A tool of oppression and testament to a misplaced sense of superiority,” he explained.

Two of his guards glanced at him with uncertain expressions.

“Not the kind of talk I had expected from the Order of Truth,” Ilea said.

“And yet you have not struck me down. Perhaps it was a curse that led you here, but a faint hope remains that it was the gods instead,” Benedict said.

“What if it was just me who chose to come? A lucky coincidence,” Ilea said.

He laughed, relaxing in his chair as he tried to calm his guards unsuccessfully.

“There are no coincidences, Lilith of Ravenhall. You’ve come here for a reason, now tell me, what is it you seek?” he asked.

Ilea spent the next few minutes outlining what had happened in the other cities and what she was looking for.

The group looked at her blankly before they started hastily discussing in the native language. Two of the warriors were especially irritated, pointing at her a few times as Benedict tried to calm them with confident words.

He held up a hand after a few more seconds. "Lilith... you must understand. I'm an Acolyte of the Order. While I strongly disagree with some of the rules and decisions made by the Elders, it's not easy to accept that such a cataclysmic ritual was truly developed and used by our own people. Without proof I cannot accept it as the truth."

He held up a hand before she could reply. "However... and this is not information I share lightly. I have made my own investigations into certain members of our Order, and members of this very city's nobility. Crimes uncovered and documented, to be released to the Empire upon their taking of the city, should they manage such. I don't know if I'll be alive to see them but perhaps they're safe in your hands."

The warriors again spoke in hushed and stressed voices.

"Lilith. Is there a way to prove who you are to my guardians? It might be easier than trying to convince them otherwise," he said, sounding tired.

Ilea covered herself in her ashen armor, spreading her wings as she watched them all take a step back, uttering single words that sounded like curses.

"Really? The freezing and voice didn't do it?" she asked, a little dumbfounded.

"Most will never meet the heroes and villains carried in songs, nor do many live up to their name," Benedict said. "I will help you, simply because the risk of such a ritual is too high to ignore, your name carrying too much weight for your words to be ignored."

"Great. So any idea where it could be prepared? I'd assume they need more people than usually present to set it up. Tons of blood magic runes and likely space magic ones too," she said.

"Space Magic? That... no," he murmured before stepping to one of the bookshelves behind him. He activated an enchantment that opened up a hidden section.

Benedict took out several books and a few folders filled with documents and letters.

He placed it all on the table before he started looking through some of them. He said something in the native tongue before the warriors sheathed their weapons, helping him look through the large amount of information.

Ilea glanced at the white haired healer and smiled, her ash gone again.

"A.. ap... apologies," the woman said and bowed.

"Don't worry about it," Ilea said. "What's your name?"

The girl glanced towards Benedict who just smiled and nodded.

"I'm Faith, Lady Lilith. Please excuse my accent, I've only started learning Elos Standard half a year ago."

Literally no accent, Ilea thought. "He give you that name?"

"Yes, ma'am. I'm a slave in Acolyte Benedict's employ," she said, reciting the words she must've said many times before.

“Only officially. It’s difficult to remain without scrutiny in the position I’m in without holding slaves,” Benedict said offhandedly.

“Nice Order that you have then,” Ilea said with an exaggerated smile. “Maybe I should join too.”

“It’s city policy. The Order has little to do with it. I won’t pretend that many of our members don’t have similar views but change requires time and effort, education and most importantly, faith,” he said.

Ilea looked at the woman again and smiled. “You’re the one to change the city!” she laughed at the girl’s confused expression. “And not the invading armies, I’m sure they won’t change a thing.”

“I use the tools I was given, Lilith. As do you. It just so happens that I don’t have an army or immeasurable power to back my opinions,” Benedict said.

“Fair enough,” Ilea said.