

Chapter 824 Westward

Ilea smiled when she landed in Ravenhall. It had already been early in the night when Evan had called for her. By now she assumed the suns would rise again in a few hours, moonlight illuminating the square. The store was closed, but she decided to knock on the door anyway. Large metal letters above the storefront spelled out Big Ass Pastries. She didn't check with her dominion, but Popi had been an adventurer past the two hundreds. She assumed he wouldn't sleep quite as much as a human below fifty or a hundred.

As soon as she had knocked, she heard noise from above. Someone opened a window, creaking resounding before the wood shutters were opened. Popi looked out and yawned. He flicked his fingers when a flame appeared above his palm. "Good night."

"Good night, Popi, long time no see," Ilea said.

He nodded and grinned.

She mimicked the gestures.

"An emergency," he stated.

The man understood.

"Yes. I will pay well," she said.

He shook his head with closed eyes, armor appearing around him before he jumped out of the window with a fluid motion. He landed with a loud thump. "What do you need?"

"Cakes. Lots of cakes," she said.

"Follow me," Popi said before leading her into the store.

Ilea didn't really know what to expect when she was ushered into a corner in the kitchen. Several metal tables appeared before him before he tapped them, cakes appearing in turn.

All of them had at least two layers, green, blue, red, some with fruits, others with bits and pieces of chocolate and caramel, most had decorations added with cream, sprinkles, and chocolate dust. Each cake seemed to have a theme of its own. Some were chaotic, bold and loud with intense colors and broad designs, others were subdued, calm and serene, almost reminding of ice sculptures. Ilea admired the artworks from her corner in the room, one of them reminding her of the Descent, not quite as many layers but just as diverse, seven different floors that flowed into each other.

She spoke when he looked at her with an expectant glance. "They're beautiful, Popi. I'm not even sure they should be eaten. And that is not something I will say lightly."

"Cakes. Should be eaten," he said, raising a finger. "How many?"

"I'm going to meet foxes," Ilea said.

His eyes lit up. "Like Catelyn?"

"Maybe," Ilea said. Perhaps she should've inquired about what the Mava were like before coming here, but it just felt right. Who could possibly dislike cakes? They had enough condensed calories

and sugar to light up the entire brain of any biological creature. *Maybe that's why the Ascended are causing trouble. Giving up cake is just suspect.*

He nodded in a thoughtful manner. "Two hundred."

"Two hundred cakes?" Ilea asked.

"Two hundred." His words were final.

Perhaps it was excessive. Then again, she was beyond level seven hundred, and the Accords were throwing around armies of ancient machines to fight in whatever conflict that came up. And they could use the support of any species and nation with Ker Velor. Perhaps some excess was reasonable. Ilea walked towards the tables without a word and started storing the cakes, one by one as the baker summoned the masterpieces he had created. She didn't want to ask how much time even a single one had required.

When they were done, Ilea started to summon gold pieces onto one of the tables but Popi held up a hand.

"Tell the foxes who made these," he said. "That is all." He yawned. "Sleep."

"Right. Thanks, Popi. I'll be sure to tell them," Ilea said with a smile. She raised her brows when the large man hugged her tightly.

"Go and fight, small healer," he said and patted her head.

Just because it's you, Ilea thought before she waved and teleported out, her wings spreading. *Small healer. I'm above average. And goddamn fucking Lilith.* She couldn't help but smile at someone treating her in a normal manner. For a split second she thought that perhaps the foxes would do the same, but the reason for her going there wasn't exactly to blend in and explore their culture. Food culture to be specific. *Damn these responsibilities.*

She summoned a gate to the domain of the Meadow. *At least they might set up a feast for an important member of the Accords.*

Ilea appeared to an already expanding landscape, work areas set up with teams of people from various groups and species working together, maps laid out, chunks of metal, artifacts, and food. Many had created or summoned their own chairs, others sitting on the wooden sort provided by the Meadow. Many stood, talking in agitated voices.

It felt like she had stepped into a busy open plan office, but then she supposed the organization of an alliance like the Accords required at least this much. *"I seem to have missed a lot. And I was just gone for half an hour."*

"The planning is underway. We've split everything into various groups and specialties, trying to tackle the problems from various directions. Information gathering and distribution, scouting and exploration, strike and response teams, defensible positions and evacuation, impact evaluation and risk factors, divination and locating, resource management and army deployment. Just a few broad sections, while Aki and I manage the communication between the various teams," the Meadow explained.

Ilea summoned a bottle of ale and flicked it open, taking a sip as she watched the busy happenings. Hundreds of people by now, some of them interviewing the Mind Weavers. A few dozen beings stood around Nes, asking questions and occasionally rushing off with new key information for their teams or sections. The same with Scipio and Evan. Aki was everywhere, as was the Meadow of

course. Having essentially a robot hive mind and an eldritch being capable of multi track communication made the organization quite a lot easier and streamlined. She assumed Claire was twitching with excitement. Not for what was to come but just the sheer efficiency of their organization.

“So this is actually happening,” she mused, strolling past the tables and towards Octavia, the woman sitting alone on top of a rock, hugging her knees while watching the busy scene.

“The threat is plausible based on our communication with Nes Mor Atul, Octavia Strand, and Nelras Ithom. Coupled with what we already know. The return of the Architect is not certain, yet the potential risk is too high to ignore. As it were, this won’t be the last threat the Accords will have to deal with. Nipha was just a test run, this here might be another, but the experience and optimization will allow us to face future issues with higher efficiency, and thus provide security for the beings of our lands,” the Meadow spoke.

Ilea raised her brows, glancing towards the tree as she felt a strange shift in the fabric. *“Are you alright?”*

It remained silent for an uncharacteristic amount of time.

“In... Erendar, I had resources, people that would listen, but nowhere near to this extent. Perhaps we could’ve changed the outcome. With the Accords,” the Meadow said.

“I’m sorry,” Ilea sent.

“Do not be. They fought until the end, and you saved their species. Here now they are, a part of Hollowfort and the Accords. I too have persevered and may once more help in the protection of those who are awakened,” the Meadow spoke.

“Always another Drake,” Ilea said. *“All we can do is face the now. And try again, if we fail.”*

“Poetic, from an idiot like yourself,” the Meadow sent.

“The most dangerous idiot you’ll ever meet,” Ilea sent back, pointing at her two eyes before she angled her index finger at the crystal tree in the distance.

A few people glanced at her but quickly continued their work.

“I suppose you’re done,” she sent to Octavia, walking the rest of the way as the woman’s attention fell on her.

“Indeed. The Meadow has tasked me to escort you to the Mava, to win them for this cause,” Octavia said.

“You don’t sound convinced,” Ilea said as she stepped next to her.

“There is a reason I aimed to contact humanity first,” Octavia said. *“Should I brief you on the Mava?”*

“Do they like cakes?” Ilea asked.

Octavia looked at her for a few seconds. Then she seemed thoughtful for another few. *“I suppose they might.”*

“Great, then that’s everything I need to know,” Ilea said with a smile.

Octavia glanced at her, squinting her eyes lightly. *“You think in a similar manner to them. This may actually work...”*

“Where do we go then?” Ilea asked.

“Where can we go? I understand the Accords have introduced a teleportation network to the Plains,” Octavia said. *“I would’ve very much liked to have that available when I had been here. Do they work across realms?”*

Ilea glanced at the ceiling of the large cavern. *“You know, I never asked myself that.”*

“Meadow, do the gates work through realms?” she asked.

“No,” came the quick answer. *“And don’t try anything like that beyond your own abilities. There are beings lurking in the void that we do not want to lure anywhere near a realm of awakened.”*

“Beings lurking in the void,” Ilea said to Octavia.

“I assume that means the answer is no,” the woman stated.

“How did the Ascended do it then?” Ilea asked, looking at the Meadow.

“There are many ways to breach through the fabric. The dangers lay in permanent connections and reoccurring travel, or so are theories I had, theories I share with the Fae of this realm,” the Meadow sent. *“I will talk to Nes Mor Atul about the technology the Ascended have discovered. For whatever problems they have caused for this realm and for us now, their research is impressive.”*

“High praise coming from you. How come you never warned me about the dangers of realm travel?” Ilea asked.

“Personal anchors and travel based on Class specific skills should not bear any risks,” the Meadow sent.

“Right. Lots of uncertainty there, old tree,” she said.

“As much as I downplay the power of your brain, your space magic capabilities and realm travel options are beyond most beings. Even I could not simply travel back to Erendar as easily as you go to Kohr,” the Meadow spoke.

“I’m special,” Ilea said, drinking from her ale.

“The worst kind of special. Wielding magic you do not truly understand,” the Meadow said.

“What can I say? I’m a natural,” she said with a smirk.

A spacial roll of many eyes occurred in the fabric all around. *“There is a reason you so easily befriended the Fae. You may very well evolve to become one of them some day.”*

“Only if I can still eat and taste food,” Ilea said as an Executioner joined them.

“I’ve prepared the closest gate location to the territory of the Mava, as detailed by Octavia,” the machine spoke, glancing between the two.

“Iz?” Ilea asked.

“Yes. If you would,” Aki replied.

Ilea opened another gate, gesturing for Octavia to step through before she followed the Executioner.

“The Taleen laid some ground work in regards to the gate network,” she said as her wings spread to keep herself afloat.

“*You can use their network too then?*” Octavia asked as she took in the former capital. She floated without any wings, the whole thing looking effortless.

“Yeah, but that’s not public knowledge,” Ilea said, following the woman’s gaze to the central Sphere.

“*The Sentinel of Akelion,*” Octavia sent.

“*You can’t speak, can you?*” Ilea asked. She had suspected it for a while now. The woman was sending out any random comments and musings that seemed to come to her.

“*No. An unknown condition. Some people thought I was cursed. A baby that does not scream. I’m glad my father could see beyond such nonsense, but then he came with his own downsides,*” she sent, her eyes widening slightly before she looked away.

“*When did you learn telepathy? It was somewhat recent for me,*” Ilea said.

Octavia considered for a moment, floating in the air.

“This way,” the Executioner spoke and started moving above the city, stepping on void magic materializing in the fabric for mere split seconds.

Ilea moved her wings, following with Octavia behind her. The divination mage didn’t reply as they made their way into a large temple like building, stone pillars both outside and inside the structure, the shrine within tended to by several dwarves dressed in dark green gowns. Aki led them past, Ilea nodding to the dwarves, most of them greeting her in turn. Her mantle covered her form after all. Aki led them past and into the back hall. A single gate stood at the center of the barren room, various Hunter Praetorians guarding the location as they surely did every teleportation gate in Iz.

They stepped on it before the Executioner walked over. “You’ll be near Elven territory, somewhere east of the Sunlight Wastes and south of where we assume the Sky Domain to be located. Be careful, and good luck,” Aki said before he activated the gate.

The space magic manifested as Ilea removed her resistance, the two moved through the fabric before they arrived on a moss covered teleportation platform. Moonlight shone past the clouds above as Ilea checked the surroundings. She heard skittering noises from various small animals, a larger winged being taking flight from the crown of a nearby tree. A dark creature with two heads and talons. Too far away to identify but she could tell the creature had noticed them, and had chosen to run. Or fly in this case.

She could not make out any elves nearby, the tree line far less dense here compared to what she had seen of the Navali forest. They were on the western outskirts of the far reaching landmark. Even the Still Valley was far east and to the north, according to her marks, though they were still far away from the Krahen Isles. Ilea crouched down, brushing away some of the moss covering the runed stone.

“*You talk to me as to a friend,*” Octavia said, interrupting Ilea’s thoughts.

“*I am who I am,*” she answered with a smile. “*I don’t really blame you for what happened in Ravenhall. Adam was a colossal idiot. He knew what he was doing and made his choice.*”

“*If I hadn’t been there, he would not have come,*” Octavia said.

“If he hadn’t fucked your mom, he wouldn’t have caused the massacre,” Ilea said.

“You have a strange way to look at things,” Octavia said.

“I suppose I’ve seen a lot of strange things. And I’ve made wrong choices before. We can talk for hours about why or why not you share blame. I share blame too, for a lot of things that have happened, some of it may or may not have been caused by my wrong choices, some of it acceptable within the scope of my personal morals, other things probably not. Things move fast, and people make mistakes. I think all we can really do is try to be better in the now,” Ilea said.

“Even when your choices have caused the deaths of a hundred thousand people?” Octavia asked.

“Probably more than that. You have to count all the people that died afterwards as well,” Ilea said with a dry tone. *“And hey, our choices now might cause the deaths of millions.”*

“I’ve tried to escape the pressure put on me by the position of my father. You’re not helping,” Octavia said.

“Well, you’re hardly one of the big hitters with your measly five hundred levels. Now let’s get a move on before a Monarch gets interested in two lost souls. I’ve got cake to deliver,” she said. *“Where to?”*

Octavia started to float, pointing westward. *“How fast can you fly?”*

“Just go, I’ll try to keep up,” Ilea said.

The woman glanced at her before a pulse of magic exuded from her form, blue glowing runes appeared in three separate floating circles around her before she shot off into the distance, a wave of air moving past. Leaves rustled in the nearby trees as a cloud of dust formed.

Ilea took a lost look around as her wings charged and she followed.

She quickly caught up but found Octavia accelerating once more.

A dark mountain range rose on their right, above the remnants of the Navali forest, higher than even the Naraza range far to the east. If it hadn’t been for the North, and the various other realms Ilea had visited, she would’ve thought it the most impressive set of mountains she had seen. Southwards to their left, the outcrops of trees grew more rare as time went on, rocky terrain taking over before the first signs of sand showed. Twenty minutes later, all she could see to the south was an extensive desert, a storm raging in the distance, near as high as the mountains to the north, any sign of grass, moss, and trees gone.

Ilea was impressed with Octavia’s flying speed, but then she was one of very few three mark humans she had met. And to survive in Kohr, one had to be capable. They remained quiet and close to the ground, no monsters or elves coming for them, though Ilea would’ve welcomed a small distraction. She hoped Aki’s scouting would bear some fruit in the near future. *The real purpose of collecting all those keys was just to get myself a scouting network to find four marks. And the Meadow calls me an idiot.* She shook her head, following the fluttering form of white furs as she considered what a bunch of foxes would think of Octavia’s attire.