

Chapter 619 Bird food

Kyrian steeled himself before he knocked on the door.

“Come in,” Claire’s voice resounded. She smiled at him when he entered. “I thought you had forgotten about me.”

He froze up for a second, looking at the painting girl sitting near the office window. He scratched the back of his head and focused back on Claire. “Apologies. I was busy with training.”

“Taken a liking to the Sentinels. I could’ve expected as much. Trian already offered you a position?” Claire asked. “Ah what am I talking about, go talk to Cless. She missed you.”

Kyrian remained where he stood, watching the girl paint for a moment before he smiled. “She’s grown.”

“She has. Quite talented that one. Snarky and annoying too, because she knows. I’m just glad she paints so much,” Claire said.

He hesitated. “She missed me?”

“Of course she did. You took care of her after all. Painted you plenty too, in addition to the times I asked her to,” Claire said.

Kyrian smiled and sat down on one of the armchairs. “I don’t want to disturb her. Is it alright if I wait for her to finish?”

Claire smiled. “It will take some time. But I don’t mind, no.”

“Thank you,” Kyrian said. “And no, Trian didn’t offer a position yet. He told me I could ask once I’m ready.”

“I’ve got plenty of jobs too, mostly in case you want to take a break from fighting. I assume you’re staying with the Sentinels? Ilea owns plenty of nicer houses, one I kept empty for your return,” Claire said.

“I’m flattered. But the room I have in the headquarters is perfectly fine,” Kyrian said. “Luxurious even.”

He had lived in an entire keep for the past years but it was company he lacked, not space.

Claire nodded lightly. “Fair enough. Can I ask a few questions in regards to your adventures?”

He gestured for her to continue.

“You didn’t happen to come across large amounts of gold you’d need someone to manage?” she asked.

Kyrian sighed. “No. I think whoever built the keeps left in an orderly manner. Few valuables. Even very little rotten food.”

“Either that or they didn’t have any use for such items in the first place,” Claire said. “But with your level as it is, and your potential adventures, just know that I’m happy to manage whatever you come

across. I'll invest it in a manner according to your wishes. Another thing, I know you, but things have changed somewhat since we went on Shadow missions together."

"A bit of an understatement," Kyrian said with a smile.

"Exactly. You are known to be a Shadow, or a Sentinel. If neither had been the case before, now it is. Your actions will somewhat reflect back onto Ravenhall. So if you're planning to start any wars, execute nobility, topple governments, I implore you to talk to me first," Claire said.

Kyrian looked at her and started laughing. He wiped away a few tears before he cleared his throat. "I'm sorry that Ilea scarred you so."

Claire looked at him with a deadpan expression before she rubbed her eyes. "I haven't slept in a while."

"I'm not offended, don't worry. I'll make sure to consider the political and economic impacts of my actions, and I will consult you or others before taking drastic actions. But I don't plan to do anything like that for now," he said, scratching his chin.

"Don't scare me like that. You almost sound like you will," Claire said. "Please, not another one."

"I understand that Lilith's actions have helped cement Ravenhall as the independent power it is today, but that's not what you're talking about. I just don't know yet where exactly I want to go, what I want to do. It will take some time and I don't want to give you a promise I may not be able to keep," Kyrian said.

"Good. Would you agree to meet the other council members at least? Some you know already," Claire said.

"I don't know if I want to make decisions of that magnitude," Kyrian said.

"I didn't suggest you join the government. But you might be more powerful than even the Elders of the Shadow's Hand. Can we count on you in an emergency?" Claire asked.

"For you, always," Kyrian said immediately.

"I'm sorry," Claire said, rubbing her eyes again before she summoned herself a bottle of water and a glass. "I'm focusing too much on your power. I know."

"I'm aware of the position you're in," Kyrian said. "Don't worry."

Claire downed her water and stood up. "No. Come on, I'll take a break. Are you hungry?"

"I don't need much food anymore," Kyrian said.

"You didn't answer the question," Claire said.

"I could eat, sure," Kyrian said.

"Good. Remember the Golden Drake?" she asked and walked over to Cless, a few enchantments flickering away. "Girlie, you didn't eat lunch yet, right?"

Cless turned her head, her gaze moving past Claire as if she didn't exist, her eyes settling on Kyrian before she blinked a few times. Her brush fell to the floor as she rushed the man, hugging him as she giggle cried.

Kyrian awkwardly patted her back, leaning down a little to reach her. "Hello Cless, it's okay."

Claire smiled as she crossed her arms, putting the brush back near the canvas, taking a glance at the work in progress before she walked over.

“I know you kept an eye on me,” Kyrian said. “Thank you.”

The cries intensified, the girl looking up with tears streaming down her face before she started laughing. “I knew you’d come back!”

“Thanks for believing in me,” Kyrian said, lifting the girl up before he placed her on his shoulders, eliciting a giggle.

Cless pointed towards the door like he was some kind of horse.

“What?” Kyrian asked, seeing Claire’s stare.

She shook her head and chuckled. “Nothing. Come on, I think Keyla just changed up the menu again.”

Ilea sat on a mountain of corpses. Well not a mountain, a mound maybe.

Purple lightning sent splatters of blood and bits of flesh upward, the valley of death flowing red with blood and bones.

She didn’t need Monster Hunter anymore, the stench and flesh attracting plenty of beasts. The lower level Bluetails got injured by the storms but many still braced the danger for some more or less fresh meat it turned out. They also had some way of telling when the lightning would strike near them. Not so much when they had an Ilea sized ashen maniac grappling them with deadly intent but the birds were too stupid to understand as much.

“Your isle makes it difficult to find Bluetails to hunt,” Feyrair said, landing nearby. He caught a flying chunk of meat and started eating.

“Plenty of birds on the other isles,” Ilea said, watching the few creatures eat the remains of their own kind. Two screeched at each other, apparently not satisfied with the heaps of corpses to choose from. They were all below level seven hundred, hardly worth the effort with how well she knew their species by now.

“Not an option,” Feyrair said.

“Too far away in case Neiphato gets into trouble?” she asked. “Don’t hiss at me, I know you care about him.”

“So what if I do?” Feyrair asked.

“Hey, you’re the one judging yourself, I’m all for it,” Ilea said. “But I promise you I’ll protect him if he gets into trouble. He has my mark.”

“Until you get distracted by a four mark and dive back into the ocean. It wasn’t wise, Ilea,” he said.

“Wasn’t wise... coming from the elf who faced a dragon,” she murmured.

He looked at the sky, his right arm scorched when a bolt of lightning came down on him. “A glorious day that was. Also not wise.”

“See, both our endeavors were worth it in the end. And I told you I won’t go there again, not for some time,” she said.

“Good. We’re land creatures, maybe sky creatures. But not made for water,” he said.

Ilea watched another two Bluetails land in the distance, their size and movements suggesting they were just as inexperienced as the others. “From an evolutionary standpoint, I think you’re wrong. But I get where you’re coming from.”

“Did you evolve to gain aquatic abilities or water magic? Didn’t think so,” Feyrair retorted.

Makes sense in context I guess, Ilea thought, not about to consider the formation of this realm and its species when there were Leviathans in the water and dragons in the skies.

“You killed a lot of them,” he said.

“Useful for a while,” Ilea replied.

“Now you’re waiting for more Mature ones?” he asked.

She stood up with a smile on her face, stretching as she was struck by arcane lightning, the strike energizing her. “Speak of the devil.”

“That one? Are you sure?” he asked.

“Maybe, look at the talon length. Ah but its wings are not large enough. Still, close enough,” she said and vanished.

[Northern Bluetail – lvl ???] - [Hungry/Male]

“I’ll think about it,” Kyrian said.

“I’m sure you’d do well as a teacher, but just as much as a squad leader, or a solitary Hunter,” Trian said.

Kyrian smiled, drinking from his tea. “I don’t think I’ll hunt alone again, for quite some time.”

“The others will feel inadequate next to you,” Trian said.

“Then they better catch up quickly,” Kyrian said.

The man smiled. “I’m sure they will. Sure you want to go back to those isles? Now that you’ve been here for a few weeks?”

"I've stayed too long already. I'm sure Ilea is getting bored of just fighting Bluetails. Plus, I have some unfinished business on those isles. And a promise to keep," he said.

Trian sighed. "Very well. I'll make sure the Vrayar are fed and healthy."

"Thank you."

"I bet Cless wasn't happy when you told her," Trian said.

Kyrian scratched his cheek, catching himself and stopping. "She was worried. But once I told her I'd bring back a real Bluetail claw, she was ready to send me away with the next caravan."

Trian laughed. "She reminds me of my younger self."

Kyrian snorted. "I wonder why."

"How dare you offend nobility like that. I will have you know that my childhood was full of hardship. Different outfits to choose from, dancing lessons, harsh instructors," Trian said.

"It sounds horrific. I wish you could've grown up searching for metals below the Asila dungeons. Sunlight and affection are entirely unneeded anyway," Kyrian said.

"I don't know if I like this confident you. I was taught to be witty, can't have a peasant speak to me like that," Trian replied.

Kyrian stood up and spread his arms. "Who knows, maybe I'm the last living son of an assassinated former king."

"You've been reading too much," Trian said.

"Ilea has a good library. Already collecting dust. Least I could do was offer those stories some attention," Kyrian said. He found himself smiling. "Thank you, Trian. Really."

"Go on, praise me more, peasant," Trian said, the look in his eyes saying more than the words coming out of his mouth.

Or Kyrian believed so anyway. The man had brought him back to life, he and the Sentinels. It felt good. Around them he thought he was a different person altogether. Confident, smart, and capable. He almost started to believe that he had become one of the most powerful humans in the region. Almost.

"Don't get lost again," Trian said.

"I'll do my best," Kyrian answered, cracking his neck. "Wish me luck, I'll have to face a likely bored Ilea."

Trian grimaced, watching as Kyrian raised his hand, revealing the dissipating mark. "That's the worst kind. Should've done that somewhere far away from the city. I don't want to end up as collateral damage."

"You're the reason I did it here. I'm sure she won't go overboard if her precious Sentinels are close by," Kyrian suggested.

"Just hope for Lilith and not Ilea," Trian said.

Kyrian smiled. "I was thinking the other way around."

He glanced back, finding an ashen figure standing in front of a closed door, wings flowing away as icy blue eyes stared at him. Kyrian could smell blood, both old and fresh. He turned around and spread his arms, a thick helmet of steel closing over his head. *Just in case.*

“Three weeks,” she said.

Three and a half technically.

She sighed. “Do you still want to come or not? You don’t have to.”

He deflated a little. “I’ll come.”

“If you need more time...,” Ilea said.

“Don’t,” Kyrian answered. “I’m ready,” he said and walked over, touching her shoulder. “I’m sorry I didn’t call for you earlier. I just...,”

“Don’t apologize. There is no need. I could’ve come as well. Just... didn’t want to pressure you,” Ilea said.

And I didn’t want to interrupt you, Kyrian thought. “Thank you.”

Ilea scratched her cheek, looking at the nearby wall. “I... we... might’ve done some work on the Bluetail population.”

He just laughed. “They reproduce like rabbits. Just give it a month.”

“They’re not born of mana?” Ilea asked.

Kyrian shrugged. “I didn’t look for their nests. I just know their numbers always recovered.”

“We have to hunt even more then...,” Ilea murmured.

“I doubt it’s possible to defeat them all. I have a few other interesting places in mind anyway. I’m sure you’re up for a change,” Kyrian said.

Ilea nodded to herself. “Only got three four marks. A change would be nice.”

Three. Four marks.

Kyrian schooled his expression, remembering that he was wearing a helmet once more. “Poor you.”

“Do I detect sarcasm?” Ilea asked, nodding to Trian before giving him a thumbs up.

The lightning mage smiled before he pointed to the door. “You’re wasting time. Now leave my office.”

Ilea obliged, displacing herself and Kyrian out through the headquarters, bringing them to the city gates where they left normally.

She glanced at the metal mage, surprised when his helmet peeled back again. He looked more calm. *Handsome.*

He actually looked at her, making her smirk. “What are you thinking?” he asked.

“Woman things. You wouldn’t understand,” she said and spread her wings. “Follow me.”

They quickly reached the gate prototype leading north.

“A taleen gate this close to Ravenhall?” Kyrian asked.

She smiled. “Nope. This is human made. Mostly.”

“What do you mean mostly?” Kyrian asked, the spell activating.

The two appeared within Meadow’s realm, Iana and Christopher focused intensely on a stone platform filled with runes.

“*Oh, hello there,*” the Meadow spoke. “*Still no evolution. Why are you stalling, Ilea?*”

“*Fuck you too, tree,*” she said.

“*And you bring another interesting human. Can you hear me?*” the tree asked.

“I can, yes,” Kyrian said and bowed lightly. “Nice to meet you, sir tree.”

“*Is he mocking me? I can’t tell,*” Meadow said.

Ilea glanced at Kyrian and back to Meadow. “*I can’t tell either.*”

“*I’m glad you found your friend, Ilea. Do you require a lift, as you like to call it?*” the Meadow asked.

“Yep, closest Taleen dungeon with a functioning gate,” she said.

“*Ah yes. I did analyze the map,*” the Meadow said. “*Show me yours, I will point it out to you. Based on the location and likely altitude, it should be a small facility.*”

Ilea did as it asked, the tree sending them on their way a few moments later. “*Thanks.*”

“*Meadowspeed,*” it said right before activating its spell.

“This fucking tree,” Ilea murmured when they appeared in a crevice close to the Taleen dungeon.

Kyrian laughed.

“Don’t encourage it,” she said.

“Can’t say I dislike that creature,” he answered and flew up and out of the crevice. “This way, right?”

She followed, the two of them rushing through the raging arcane storms without a care in the world, Kyrian occasionally hit, his armor deflecting the lightning without even leaving an impact.

“Jealous?” he asked.

“Don’t get cocky now, metal boy,” Ilea said.

“Ah, envious is the right word. Apologies, I’m still working on my reading,” he said.

“Enjoyed your time, didn’t you?” Ilea asked in a dry tone.

“Very much, yes,” Kyrian replied. “Can’t wait to fight more Bluetails.”

“Same,” Ilea replied, scrolling through the advancements she had made in the past weeks.

‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Northern Bluetail – lvl 821]’

...

‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Mature Bluetail – lvl 1029]’

...

‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Northern Bluetail – lvl 956]’

...

‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Mature Bluetail – lvl 1003]’

She had found two Mature ones, in addition to several dozen eight and nine hundred ones. Also hundreds that were lower still. The challenge however wasn’t close to the same as the first four mark she had bested. Ilea knew all their moves, had an answer to all their spells. The only reason she still deemed it more than valuable to fight the monsters was the ridiculous level difference.

‘ding’ ‘The Azarinth Sentinel has reached lvl 488 – Five stat points awarded’

...

‘ding’ ‘The Azarinth Sentinel has reached lvl 496 – Five stat points awarded’

‘ding’ ‘Kin of Ash has reached lvl 481 – Five stat points awarded’

...

‘ding’ ‘Kin of Ash has reached lvl 489 – Five stat points awarded’

‘ding’ ‘The Faen Valkyrie has reached lvl 439 – One stat point awarded’

...

‘ding’ ‘The Faen Valkyrie has reached lvl 450 – One stat point awarded – One Core skill point awarded’

Compared to her first kill, the many hundreds of high level Bluetails provided greatly diminished returns for her levels. And yet she still advanced faster than she had on Erendar. At first she thought the levels of the beings more than exaggerated but watching Feyrair and Neiphato fight the creatures, she came to the conclusion that her skill set just fit the enemy very well.

The dragonling could kill the monsters more quickly, but he simply couldn’t face any above eight fifty, his regeneration and mana not able to keep up, despite comparable resilience. It was certainly interesting to watch the Elves from time to time.

‘ding’ ‘Phaseshift reaches 3rd lvl 21’

‘ding’ ‘Flare of Creation reaches 3rd lvl 26’

'ding' 'Body of the Valkyrie reaches 3rd lvl 23'

'ding' 'Deviant of Humanity reaches 3rd lvl 4'

'ding' 'Deviant of Humanity reaches 3rd lvl 5'

'ding' 'Water Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 4'

'ding' 'Wind Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 6'

'ding' 'Wind Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 7'

Her skills grew less from the countless battles than from the single four mark she had fought under water. She did wonder how much of it had to do with the fear and danger she was in back then, and how much was simply based on the fact that she got continuously more familiar with the creatures. Both likely played a role.