

Chapter 638 Bonding

Phoebe had seen the girls before but she couldn't recall their names. Mila was already there, waving at her with a smile.

"Trian, her? Really?" one of the two said.

The girl looked like she was in her late teens, one of the younger Sentinels around. Long black hair fell down her back, slightly curly. Freckles and deep black eyes made her face easy to look at.

Phoebe couldn't quite gauge the complaints. "What's the issue?" she asked.

The girl looked at her and grinned. "You're a cold asshole."

"Isn't that something an asshole would say?" Phoebe asked. *At least she's direct.*

"No, that's something someone observing an asshole might say," the girl said. "I'm really nice. Right, Ember?" she added and poked the healer next to her.

Ember had her hood up, covering a part of her face as she nearly stumbled to the side. Green eyes looked at the ground, a single brown braid coming out from the hood and resting on her leather armor past her shoulder.

"I g... guess you are," Ember said.

The other girl rejoiced, raising her hands in victory. "There you have it. Plus you didn't say you're not an asshole, so either way I'm right."

Mila walked over to Ember and grabbed her hand, whispering something to her.

Phoebe glanced over, her eyes resting on the two hands touching before she looked back at the smiling girl in front of her.

[Fire Mage – lvl 22]

Ember is level fifty... and I think she's got the Medic Sentinel Class like me.

"You shouldn't insult people who could win in a fight against you," she said.

The girl pointed at herself. "We haven't fought. How would I know if you're stronger?"

One of those, Phoebe thought and rolled her eyes, glancing at Trian. *I can see your smirk, old man. You can't hide it.*

"This is Willa," Trian said after clearing his throat. "Willa, meet Phoebe. Ember and Mila you both know already. None of you have agreed to join a team of more than two, which again, is perfectly acceptable. I won't repeat the benefits of working in larger groups however. You all know them. All I ask is that you train together for one day."

Willa sighed. "Ilea doesn't work in a team either."

Why would you bring up that demon?

"If you're as strong as Ilea, you won't have to listen to my lectures anymore. Though trust me, I still try to lecture her," Trian said.

“You’re just jealous that she’s stronger than you,” Willa said with a smirk.

Phoebe looked at the Headmaster with wide eyes. *Too daring. You’re level twenty.*

“Envious is the word you’re looking for,” Trian said. “Ilea has the wisdom to listen to the people around her. People with backgrounds and knowledge she might not possess. She trained with people and learned from them, fought and befriended beings most others wouldn’t even consider talking to. Arrogance was not what led to her power.”

And now she’ll get angry and leave us the fuck alone, well done Headm-

Willa bowed her head. “I’m sorry. I’ll try to work with them.”

Phoebe glanced between the two. The girl had changed entirely from a confident and snarky warrior attitude to that of a meek and subservient student. *She is quite young. Maybe she’s just a little dense, if she really hadn’t considered the arguments he shared just now.*

“What are you looking at?” Willa asked, glancing over.

“I’ll try my best to work with them. For today,” Phoebe said, ignoring the aggressive girl.

Trian nodded, glancing at the other two. “Is that acceptable, Ember?”

She nodded lightly. “It is. Thank you, Trian.”

Who do they think he is? Their father?

Phoebe reminded herself that many of her peers didn’t come from a normal background like herself. She had started seeing violence and war once she decided to become an adventurer but it had been her choice, the path she wanted to walk. Not many get a choice at all. She smiled to herself, thinking of her parents.

“Mila, you’re fine with it too?” Trian asked.

“Of course, Headmaster,” the woman said and bowed respectfully.

“You don’t have to address me that formally, we’re you’re teachers,” Trian said.

Mila smiled. “Which is a position deserving of respect.”

Phoebe stared at her friend, her freckles seemed to shine in the magical light coming from above. *She’s so graceful. Like a queen.*

Willa giggled to herself, looking at her.

“What?” Phoebe snapped, staring at her.

“Oh, nothing at all,” Willa said. “Should we start then. I suggest Pain Tolerance training.”

You enjoy that torture?

“And I need you healers to take care of me, otherwise I’ll die,” the girl added.

Weren’t you here ages ago? How are you still at level twenty?

“Got anything to say?” Willa asked.

“Yes. You’ve been here before I even joined. I’m a Medic Sentinel and at level eighty two. You should have gotten your Class long ago if you’d done the normal classes and training sessions,” Phoebe answered.

Willa grinned. "Because I don't want to become a Medic Sentinel. Do you really think a Class based on Lilith's teachings will be able to surpass her?"

"You want to surpass... Lilith?" Phoebe asked. The notion seemed ridiculous to her. *After that display. She must've never met her.* She just smiled lightly.

"Same look as everyone," Willa said and giggled.

"At least you don't seem arrogant about it. Though I doubt you really understand how daunting that task really is," Phoebe said.

"I'll leave you to it th-" Trian said before he froze in his tracks. He looked back at the group, raising one eyebrow before he smiled.

Phoebe thought she detected an expression she hadn't really seen on him before. *Malice? No, it couldn't be. Not Trian.*

"Is anything wrong?" Willa asked. "You're not leaving."

"I will. Just give it a minute. Someone else is joining your training," he said.

"Why would you need to wait then?" Willa asked.

Phoebe glanced at Mila, the two meeting eyes at the same time. *Oh no.*

"Oh yes," Mila said.

"What?" Willa asked, looking between them. "Tell me."

In that moment, a winged Sentinel appeared behind Trian, her wings vanishing as she landed on her feet.

Phoebe took a step back, trying to control her breathing as she averted her gaze.

Trian stepped over to the newcomer, whispering to her in a tone everybody with a Sentinel Class would easily hear. "Don't kill them. Don't torture them beyond anything they expect, don't give them gold or dangerous items, don't do anything inappropriate, and don't feed them anything weird."

No wonder some of them think he is a father figure.

"Trian, who do you think I am?" the demon queen said, an innocent smile on her face, piercing blue eyes looking out from below the hood. She wore simple leather armor and casual clothes below, looking like an adventurer at maybe level one hundred.

[Battle Healer – lvl ??]

How inconspicuous, Phoebe thought, catching herself staring before she focused on the ground again. *Don't take your eyes off the enemy,* she remembered and forced herself to look at the monster.

The Headmaster lightly punched Lilith's arm before he made for the exit. "Enjoy yourself, students."

Leaving us with the monster so he doesn't have to deal with it. So that's how it is.

Phoebe glanced over to Willa and smiled. *Now you'll understand.*

"Hey, Ilea. Been a while," the girl casually said, waving at the founder.

“Oh, Willa. You made it in after all. Congratulations. No Class yet? Are you slacking?” Ilea asked, walking closer as she squinted her eyes.

“I’m working on my resistances, and I’m trying to get an ash related general skill. Gonna get the best Class in the Sentinels,” Willa said and gave her a thumbs up.

“Commendable. But don’t wait too long to fight monsters. Otherwise you’ll end up an ancient witch dying of old age in her tower because she wanted to optimize her first Class,” Lilith said.

Willa waved her off. “Just because you rush into things doesn’t mean I have to make the same stupid mistakes.”

Don’t insult her..., Phoebe thought, her hand slightly reaching out towards the girl.

“True,” Lilith said, smiling to herself as she looked at a nearby wall. “Well, whatever. So you all have to train together for a day because you’re loners? Oh hey Ember, glad you joined as well.”

Ember bowed. “It’s good to see you’re safe, Ilea.”

They all fucking know her??

Phoebe ignored the grin plastered on Willa’s face.

“I can see there’s some tension in the room,” Ilea said. “But don’t worry, a bit of good old broken bones should help you release all that. Works for me at least.” Two ashen copies of Lilith formed next to her, the creatures rushing away before they closed the large gates to the training hall. “Can you four keep a secret between the five of us?”

“Of course,” Willa said immediately. Ember and Mila nodded.

“What about you, Phoebe?” Lilith asked.

“I... yes,” she answered, annoyed that she got flustered.

“Great,” Lilith said with a smile. “I brought a friend with me today. Violence, you can come out now.”

Phoebe watched as a creature as black as the night stepped out of Lilith’s dark hood, floating in the air as it held on to what looked like an ashen copy of itself. Its eyes were pure white, like two magical lamps. Six small wings moved on its back, two short arms and legs formed a vaguely humanoid shape, all entirely black and otherwise featureless. She had heard about the creatures in one of the classes.

[Fae – lvl 103] – [Excited / Violent]

Violent? Phoebe asked herself, confused at the mention. She knew the Fae were apparently somewhat harmless travelers and part of a whole. If they got stuck or need help, one might get rewarded in the future for rescuing them. Information that certainly wasn’t common knowledge. She had read enough monster manuals and talked to plenty of adventurers before. *Now we know where that knowledge came from*, she thought, staring at the creature.

“It’s so cuuuute!” Willa shouted and rushed towards the floating thing, hugging it close to her.

A giggling resounded from the location but Phoebe couldn’t quite place the sound. *Mind magic? Or is it something different?*

Violence! a voice resounded in her mind.

Telepathy... harmless, but I should be wary of the creature. My resistance is low.

“Violence will support us with our training today,” Lilith said and sat down on an ashen chair that formed behind her. A meal appeared in her hands before she started eating.

“Can I have some too?” Willa asked, patting the Fae on its head.

“No,” came the answer.

Phoebe didn’t dare walk closer, Mila and Ember definitely braver than her as they joined the founder.

“Of course you can,” Willa said with a smile. “Ilea is here, so just don’t over do it, okay?” she said and lifted the Fae up high.

Phoebe looked on, the little creature giggling as the girls smiled. She took a step forward. *Maybe it’s oka-*

Her thoughts froze when Willa’s eyes exploded outwards with sprays of blood and tissue.

She jumped back and activated her armor, the women looking at her with confused expressions. Willa’s eyes reformed.

“What?! I’m the weird one??” Phoebe blurted out.

Lilith started laughing.

“You can’t get Space magic resistance from just anyone!” Willa exclaimed.

Ember nodded.

“It’s true,” Mila said.

You too?

Her arms slumped down before she felt someone grab her hand. “Mila...,”

“It’s okay. Come on, Violence seems nice. It’s just excited,” the girl said and pulled her towards the monsters.

“Those who have ash magic, try to injure me,” Ilea said. “Aim for my face, I don’t want to waste another set of clothes and armor.”

We’re a healing order after all, Phoebe thought, looking at the Fae as it floated up to meet her face. “Knock yourself out,” she said.

Violence! the creature exclaimed before her vision went dark.

Ilea sat in her ashen armchair, patting the Fae’s head as she watched around sixty Sentinels writhe on the ground, her mind keeping track of their health.

"I thought Trian didn't allow for group training anymore?" Sidney asked, the woman sitting down on the armchair she had brought.

"You brought a chair to watch?" Ilea asked, looking over at the Shadow and teacher.

"It's good if they associate pain with me. Just being around will help," she said.

"You'd be more suited for this then," Ilea said. "He agreed because everyone pestered him when they heard I was around."

"Your arcane healing. I can see that," Sidney said. "Pain Tolerance training is... difficult. To process," she said. "Normal healing helps but it's nowhere near yours."

Demon

Lord

"No, I'm not," Ilea said. "I'm just helping out."

Pain

"Controlled pain so that they can endure or ignore it when they're in a real battle," Ilea said, stopping her reverse healing on a few guys who were screaming especially loud.

'ding' 'Sage of Torment reaches 2nd lvl 8'

"The people who joined early on benefited a lot from your personal training," Sidney said. "Me included."

"It does help," Ilea said, wondering how much easier all of her resistance training had been over the years, compared to people without arcane healing readily available. After the second tier of Pain Tolerance was unlocked, the difference should be minimal but it could leave psychological scars to see one's body ripped apart time and time again. "No mind mages who can help with that?"

"None willing to work with us. And the contact you have in Riverwatch apparently refused to consider it," Sidney said.

"Really? Why?" Ilea asked, glancing at the woman. She let go of Violence, the Fae going around destroying eyes and teleporting people around. She had decided not to hide the little Fae after all, mostly because it didn't sit still within her hood.

"The beauty of pain should not be disturbed, something along those lines. I agree in a sense. If pain leaves no mark, it fails to teach caution," she said, giving her a look.

"Some truth in that," Ilea said with a smile, displacing groups of people at a time.

Sidney nodded towards the Fae. "Not worried someone might talk about it?"

"If someone does anything to Violence..., let's just say it wouldn't end well," she said. "Not sure why anybody would care anyway."

"Exotic being, telepathy, space magic. Plenty to be interested in," Sidney said.

"They can just ask him then," she said and whistled, sending a charged use of Monster Hunter through the hall, most of them locking up for a few seconds.

"Still can't believe I held my own against you during your Shadow evaluation," Sidney said, immune to the call's effect.

A student tapped the ground, Ilea stopping her reversed healing immediately. She healed the student, focusing on his mind as he sat up and sighed. He gave her a thumbs up a few seconds later, resuming the training.

“You can have a go at it now,” she suggested with a smirk, resting her head on her hand as she looked at the woman.

“I don’t need to lose anymore confidence. Facing the higher level Sentinels already does enough damage,” the teacher explained.

“Hmm,” Ilea mused, looking back at the Fae, the creature flying around the hall with its ash copy in tow.

One of the Sentinels behind her collapsed, the woman’s legs broken by one of Ilea’s ash clones.

Not even a complaint, she thought, watching as the Sentinel teleported away, bending her legs back as the flesh connected again. *I do hope we’re not dooming humanity by training these people.*

“What are you thinking about?” Sidney asked.

“Consequences,” Ilea answered.

The woman chuckled. “I train with them every day. Humanity needs this power if we plan to survive, and there has never been a group as suited to hold it than the Medic Sentinels.”

Ilea smiled. “Which is exactly what every group ever said about themselves.”

“We try our best,” Sidney said.

“That wasn’t meant as criticism,” Ilea said. “It’s just human nature. I’m far from perfect, others will be as well.”

“Compared to you, they’ll have an education,” Sidney said.

“I’m getting more and more interested in a bout with you. Just to see if this combat instructor is suited for the job,” Ilea mused.

“Misusing your power to abuse followers and employees. The issues with that are covered in one of Trian’s classes. Maybe you should find time to take it,” Sidney said with a smirk.

“I’m sure a few exceptions from time to time are acceptable,” Ilea said, smiling back as she stopped her reverse healing. “That’s it for now everyone. I can only take your screaming for so long.”

“Aww, really? I can gag myself!” one of the students said. “Or we just destroy our throats?”

“Yeah, this is so much better than fire,” one of the girls said and shuddered.

“I think ice is the best to be honest,” another one said, rolling his shoulders as he joined the fray, eight students each fighting one of Ilea’s clones.

“James, do you want to meditate together later?” one of the women asked, running after a guy.

Meditate, sure, Ilea thought, looking at the Sentinels finding their friends and returning to their teams, each heading off to their classes or training, some forming a half circle around Violence to receive more Space magic training, others joining up with the ashen clones.

“You alright?” Sidney asked.

“Huh?” Ilea said, looking at the woman.

“You seemed lost there for a second,” Sidney said.

“I did? I guess, yeah. Just kinda wish I could’ve experienced the student lifestyle for a while,” she said.

The woman laughed. “You wanted to be a student? I doubt you’d be the one sitting in classrooms for longer than a few weeks.”

I suppose that’s true as well.

“You should be proud of what you built here,” Ilea said.

“Thank you. I am, as is everyone else. Don’t discredit yourself either, none of this would exist without you,” Sidney answered. “Will you be around for a while?”

“I’ll be back in the coming days but I want to check on something,” Ilea said, getting up from her chair before she cracked her neck. “Violence?”

The Fae appeared on her shoulder, an ashen copy forming next to it.