

Chapter 746 Blades

Ilea smiled, seeing the girl think.

Lily nodded. "I will do as you say... master smith," she said.

"She's becoming my new favorite human," the Meadow sent.

"She's handling all this very well," Ilea sent back. *"I wonder what happened to her father."*

"You knew them both? Saved them both, I assume," the being spoke.

"I knew them, yes. I'm not sure about saving. Elves had attacked a city, they were hiding. A shadow team was nearby anyway, I don't know how much of a difference my presence really made. But I was there, and I found their hideout," Ilea said.

"I understand. I can tell she came here only through the trust she has in you," the Meadow said.

"I think she might like Owl," Ilea said.

"More than me?" the Meadow asked.

"You're a tree and some grass. Owl is a floating purple mass of death itself," Ilea answered.

"People like trees and grass," the Meadow said. *"Though I suppose it may be different for a savage wolf."*

Ilea grinned. *"She hates that nickname already. Good thing I chose Lilith myself."*

"Savage wolf is much better. Descriptive too. What does Lilith even mean?" the Meadow asked.

Ilea ignored it. Her second name had accumulated enough fame to gain meaning in itself. "I'll introduce you to a good smith in Morhill, if you're interested. Him you can hire for gold."

The girl considered before she nodded.

"That old fart won't offer you anything for free either. Might even make it more expensive if he knows you know me. Scratch that. Just go look for Balduur on your own," Ilea said. "What are you two working on anyway?"

"It would take the better part of this afternoon to explain. Except you have some background in smithing that I was unaware of," Bralin said.

"I do not," Ilea answered. "Have fun then, come on Lily. You have to meet Owl before we go back."

They entered the Soul Forge and found the two shades standing close to the Greater Lich. All three turned when they heard the newcomers.

Boss monster of the area or what? She waved while Lily froze in her tracks. "Hey, this is Lily."

Owl approached without a sound as the Shades bowed.

The Lich floated down and leaned forward while at a reasonable distance. "Hello."

Lily looked up, glanced between Ilea and the creature. "Hello."

“Oh... someone that isn’t afraid! That’s exciting!” Owl said and spread her arms, her eyes glowing with pure death magic. She covered her mouth. “Oh... I’m sorry. Did that scare you?”

Lily shook her head.

“*I told you,*” Ilea sent.

“*Well they do seem similar in some ways. Very different in others,*” the Meadow answered.

“Why don’t you two get to know each other and I get some food from the Goose,” Ilea said.

Lily glanced at her before she looked at the large form of Owl.

“You’ll be fine. She’s nice,” Ilea said.

“That I am,” the Greater Lich confirmed, one hand towards her incorporeal chest.

The next few hours Ilea spent with Lily and the Lich. She didn’t show the northern landscape to Lily, hoping the girl would explore that bit of the world herself at some point in the future. Now that she had an idea as to what a four mark could do, the girl didn’t seem discouraged or terrified like so many of the representatives that had visited. Instead she seemed fired up.

Ilea brought her back through the gate before her next fight started.

Lily looked up when they arrived in Morhill. “That was... fun. Thank you.”

Ilea refrained from patting her head and instead just smiled. “I’m glad you enjoyed it. If you ever need anything, just let me know.” She had offered one of her marks to the girl but Lily had refused. She would find her own way, without a piece of magic to summon Lilith. Some might say the young adventurer was taking on unnecessary risks but Ilea understood her. After all, it was independence that she wanted.

“Good luck in the rest of the tournament,” Ilea said.

“I don’t need luck, Ilea,” the girl said.

“Oh?” Ilea said, raising her brows.

Lily just walked off the platform with a smug expression on her face.

Healthy self confidence. I probably shouldn’t tell her that there’s a Sentinel in her category. “I’ll see you around, in the world. Savage Wolf.”

Lily didn’t look back. “Thank you, Lilith. For everything.”

Ilea touched her shoulder and vanished, teleporting twice and spreading her wings before she flew and landed in the main arena. She entered the viewing terrace, back in the den of lions. The terrace provided the best view. And there was catering.

She received a glass of sparkling wine and sat down on the stone railings at the edge of the terrace, nobody foolish enough to claim the space she had occupied since the start. *Power does come with certain privileges.* She watched the earth mages repair the broken ground and flatten out craters, dwarven enchanters checking on the shield runes to make sure they weren’t damaged. With people above level three hundred participating, they had to make sure nothing went wrong.

Ilea nearly choked on her drink when she saw the next contestants come out through the elevator opening. She looked over and found Felicia sitting at a table talking to Julianna Veyer, the Queen of Kroll. *"Sorry to interrupt. You might be interested in the next fight,"* she sent when Felicia finished her sentence.

Ilea focused back on the two people. One of them was a middle aged warrior wearing medium plate armor, the gray and red of Lys rather obvious. As was the perfect condition of his gear. He had a family crest on his kite shield. One of the big ones, but Ilea didn't remember which one it was. Either Karrick or Anderson. *Claire will get mad if she finds out I forgot everything already.*

The man had a perfectly trimmed beard, a hard face, and short gray hair. A longsword was sheathed at his belt while he held a helmet under his arm.

His opponent was a man wearing shoddy leather armor, his black hair and beard unkempt. Two blades were sheathed on his belt. He stood in a casual manner but his eyes seemed focused.

He's not drunk. What a surprise, Ilea thought.

Felicia excused herself and walked over.

Did he lose his swords?

The woman stopped next to her and sighed. "Oh dear."

"You don't sound particularly surprised," Ilea sent.

"Well. Everything else I was excited for... this... I had hoped wouldn't happen. I assume he's just here to annoy me, or to cause a scene," she said.

"Think so? He looks sober," Ilea said.

The woman considered for a moment. *"You're right. Strange... maybe they ran out on the way here. And he's facing Major Warren Karrick. What is he planning?"*

"Who's that again?" Ilea asked.

"One of the older members of the Karrick family. Warrior and lightning mage at around two thirty five last I saw him. He's one of the more outspoken members of his House, quite proud of their power and heritage. Know that everyone is glad General Brandon Karrick remains at the top of their House," she said, touching the railings.

Ilea watched her for a few seconds. *"You seem worried."*

Felicia glanced over before she looked down. *"You know what we did... Edwin... Maria... when we returned to the capital. The nobility doesn't like people below their perceived status meddling with the status quo. I replaced my father and gained powerful allies within the army, have built my reputation and influence, but Edwin... all I can do for him is prevent an outright assassination."*

"Think the Karrick lad will try something?" Ilea asked.

"He's proud and stubborn. But I don't know how much he knows, or how much he was affected directly," Felicia said.

"Does he even know Edwin though? He looks... rugged," Ilea said.

"I don't know. I hope not," Felicia answered.

Edwin looked at the ridiculous arena. Thousands were watching. *Do they not remember the demons?* He shook his head and sighed. Perhaps it would've been better to be thrown out of the city after all. He looked at his opponent and raised his brows. *Warren Karrick*. He remembered the man had been an acquaintance of his father. Not one of their targets back in Virilya but he supposed few if any would miss the man. It was obvious he had no idea who Edwin was, the quick look he had given him, the obvious disdain. No more than adventuring rabble.

And he is representing the noble Lys army, he smiled to himself. *I need a drink*.

Had he gone too far? Edwin wasn't sure. Seeing those Sentinels, especially the one called Gael, it pissed him off. Same as the paintings, which too pissed him off. As did the viewing terrace overlooking the arena. The elite of the Plains, most of them only here to get a piece of the Lilith baked pie. He glanced up and saw them at the left hand edge. Edwin sighed. Felicia he could spot from hundreds of meters away, and the casual way the person next to her sat on the railings, it could only be her. All that, next to the most powerful men and women of the human lands. Another thing that pissed him off.

He grit his teeth. His sister was watching. Ilea was watching. The nobles of Lys were watching. Right now he was nobody. Just another man here to win glory. He stepped aside, hands going to the handles of his blades. Blades given to him by the annoying Sentinel. They were nothing special, but they were steel. It felt strange. He had fought with his own blades for as long as he could remember, even as a child training with the then heavy swords. And now he was armed with adventurer steel.

That didn't piss him off. On the contrary. He found that it felt right. He took in a deep breath when the announcer listed the title and name of his opponent, the man now putting on his helmet and raising his sword to the cheering crowd. *No blemishes on that armor, no dent on that shield. When was the last time you have fought an opponent that pushed you?*

"The opponent of Major Karrick too came from the Empire of Lys. Former noble, turned adventurer, Edwin Redleaf!" the announcer shouted through the sound enchantments.

Edwin glanced at the man in front of him, ignoring the cheers from the crowd.

"Edwin... Redleaf?" Warren asked, his sword lowering lightly.

He shrugged. "Warren. It's been a while."

"Why are you here? At this event? You dishonor your father's legacy, you bring shame to Major Redleaf. Everyone is here, watching. Have you not done enough to damage the Empire?" Warren nearly spat the last words, making it quite obvious which of the listed things he cared about the most.

Edwin didn't reply. He wasn't here to argue about his actions, his father, or the bloody fucking Empire of Lys.

Warren glanced up to the terrace. "A drunk. An exile. A murderer. You were weak when I first met you, and you remain weak. You were never fit to be a Redleaf."

I did not ask to be born into my House.

He didn't answer the man's words. The noble didn't matter.

It's my fault. Isn't it?

The announcer declared the battle started.

"I will end this quickly, in honor of the late Arthur Redleaf," Warren said, lightning sparking on his blade, the entire length clad in blue light before he dashed forward.

Edwin sighed. He closed his eyes and stood there. *Why did I come here.* He could feel the attack coming, aimed at his neck. His eyes opened and he activated his teleport.

"You're just delaying the inevitable. Face me, drunkard," Warren said.

In honor of Arthur Redleaf. He repeated the words in his mind. *The honorable Arthur Redleaf.* His father was dead. Killed not by him, nor by Maria. It had been Felicia. Felicia and Aliana.

And I lost it. Didn't I?

He dodged a few times, stumbling on the third slash, the longsword cutting into his arm. Edwin barely felt the pain, jumping back as the lightning burned through him. His opponent was a Lys noble through and through. Trained from a young age, with all the privileges gold and power could provide. Powerful Classes and monsters delivered to him. Plenty of bouts and battles against the sons and daughters of other noble Houses, perhaps sent to Baralia to slaughter the remaining slavers in their lost cities.

And what did I do? Hide? Drink?

And now you're here? What? To prove yourself?

Three more slashes left him staggering with bleeding wounds on his chest, his armor barely holding together. He could feel the warmth of his own blood, could feel the power flowing through it. How long had it been? Edwin looked at the man in front of him. It may as well have been his father. Just another nobleman, entirely blinded by power.

Prove myself? To you? He remembered the many times his father had tested him, had watched from the sidelines as he was beaten and cut, failed, and failed again.

"Let this misery end," Warren said.

He is gone.

Arthur is dead. He had little reason to remain. A part of him wanted to accept his opponent's offer. To be done with it. Edwin Redleaf was dead already.

But I'm still here. The sword came at him and he crouched, both his blades flashed out of their sheathes before he deflected Warren's strike. He took in a deep breath, activating his auras. Already he felt the wounds heal, but the blood remained.

"Finally willing to fight?" Warren asked. "To redeem your honor?"

Edwin started laughing. He smiled and charged, his blood pulsing with power. Three strikes pushed the man back, his sword deflected before Edwin struck his shield and jumped back, twirling as he avoided the next slash he had predicted. He entered Warren's range and struck with one blade,

cutting through the weak bit below his shoulder. A teleport brought him out when a burst of lightning exploded outwards.

His blood magic followed, rupturing the right shoulder of the man just as Edwin charged again.

This time he went for the knees, blades scraping against metal before he jumped back. Blood ruptured once more.

Warren fell to one knee, his sword clattering to the ground as he turned and raised his arm, bolts of lightning flashing out.

Edwin deflected them with his blood magic covered weapons. *I have faced worse than you, Warren Karrick. Nowhere near what that monster faced since I had my first bout with her... but I won't be ridiculed, not by you.*

He rolled aside when a beam of lightning flashed out from the man's outstretched arm, his shield too pulsing with power.

Edwin found he didn't much care about Ilea. He still remembered the smile on her face when she had fought the Taleen monsters, a woman so captivated by battle, the outcome had always been clear. Him meeting her didn't matter. She had helped with Arthur, but not for him. And he too was now fighting, neither to prove anything to himself, nor to Ilea.

The only person that mattered was watching from the terrace.

The only person that had ever mattered.

She had been the reason he had ran away. Edwin had hoped Felicia would one day realize her dream. A simple life, somewhere where nobody knew who she was. Things didn't exactly turn out the way he had planned.

If she wants to keep the Redleaf name, so be it. If she wants to rebuild the power of that House, so be it.

But I won't die here, ridiculed by Warren fucking Karrick while my sister is watching.

He rushed forward, dodging the bolts and teleporting when the shield exploded in a flash of lightning. Edwin didn't stop. He pushed the man and followed his teleport, chipping away at his shield until one of his swords cut deep. He ripped the defense to the side and slashed through the man's arm in turn.

Warren screamed and staggered back, Edwin kicking the shield and arm off his sword before he kept going.

"I yield!" Warren shouted, falling on his armored ass.

Edwin was close to just cutting off the man's head, standing over him with his bloodied blades.

You won. What now?

He glanced up at the terrace as Shadows and Sentinels appeared nearby, one of them grabbing the severed arm.

There is more to come, isn't there? For me.

He stood there for a moment, the cheers of the crowd a dull noise in the background. Edwin smiled, eyes focused on the two people at the edge of the terrace. He sheathed his swords and walked to the

elevator, soon stepping out into the hall where more people were waiting for their fights. He heard a voice when he left the building.

“You did it,” a black haired girl said, her canines visible as she smiled. Her attempt to hide her obvious excitement were downright laughable.

Edwin decided not to be an insufferable shithead for once. He smiled. “I did. Now it’s your turn.”

The girl grinned in a nonchalant manner. “I’m not worried about myself. You better fix that armor before your next fight.”

“I will,” Edwin said, looking past her and at the two women waiting for him.

Lily followed his gaze and made big eyes before she gave them a nod and vanished.

“Felicia. Lilith,” he said.

His sister clenched her fists and walked up to him. She punched him in the gut with unreasonable power, the air magic lifting him up before he landed on his knees. He coughed up blood before he felt her arms around him.

“You absolute idiot mess of a brother,” she whispered.

He hugged her back, looking at Ilea after a while. “Don’t suppose you can get me a set of armor? Oh great and mighty Lilith.”

Felicia stood up and looked at him. She sighed. “We have plenty of gear with us. Aliana might even have one of your armors still.”

Edwin raised himself up and looked at her. Really looked at her, for the first time in a while. “You look good. The colors suit you,” he said.

Felicia glared at him and shook her head lightly. “What has gotten into you?” She sighed. “I’ll get Aliana.”

“Don’t bother,” he said and glanced at Ilea. “I think I’d prefer something new.”