

## Chapter 119: Summons

Lysette stretched and let the cool morning air blow through her hair. At Mirae's insistence, the two had taken a few minutes after Serrena left to restyle her hair, giving her a thick, diagonal bang that covered her left eye, along with cutting off about a third of its length. Her head now felt lighter, more airy, and all around, more free when she shook it. She willed a small loop of shadow around the back of her hair and tied it up, enjoying the dew-filled wind breezing past her ears and neck as they made their way to the dining hall.

Dawn rose over the buildings to the east, sunlight peeking into the commons through the gap between the dining hall and dorms. Though it was late enough that campus was rousing for the day to come and there were others upon the grassy field before them, it was still also still early enough that there was relative quiet as Lysette and Mirae made their way back to the dorms. A couple people waved at the couple out of politeness, some paid them little mind, and a few seemed to go out of their way to make as wide of a berth as possible.

"Alright, love," Mirae said. "I'm thinking of going to the library now to do some research on my own, and then I'd like to attend class later. Can we plan on meeting up at lunch?"

"You don't want me to come along?"

"I do, but I think Dani's going to want some of your time. It has been nearly a week since the last time you two have seen each other, and, as much as I'd like to have you all to yourself, I wouldn't be a good partner if I didn't let you have some time with your friends."

Lysette smiled. "That's very thoughtful of you, Mirae. See you later?"

Mirae smiled back and gave Lysette a quick kiss. "I should certainly hope so, love!" they said as they made their way off to the library.

Lysette wistfully waved back before making her way into the dorms, up the stairs, and to her room. She knocked on the door, unsure if Danitha was sleeping or even there, and when there was no response, she slowly opened the door and scanned the room with her aurasight as she skulked her way in. Danitha was inside, seated cross-legged upon her bed, likely deep in Cultivation, and Lysette made nary a sound as she laid her bag down near the foot of her own bed.

Atop her bed was an envelope of vivid red. She picked it up and looked at the outside. Upon the front was only written the name 'Lyse Barret'. The only indication of its possible origin was the ornate wax seal upon its back, though the insigne was not one Lysette immediately recognized. She tore through the seal with a small shadow blade and read the letter contained within.

*Miss Lyse Barret,*

*By order of His Majesty, King Bertram Stewart IX, King of Domaria, you are hereby requested and commanded, under penalty of High Treason, to appear for questioning concerning your recent actions relating to your reconnaissance mission to Elithria. You have until noon on the 7th day of the tenth month of the year 7472 to appear.*

*Please bring this document with you to secure entry to the Royal Palace. Failure to appear by the allotted time will subject you to penalty, as His Majesty's law and council may deem fit.*

*Signed,*

*High Magistrate Marq Manheist*

A rather extravagant signature, one which plausibly belonged to the listed magistrate, lay below the printed text. That, coupled with the stamped and embossed seal, the wax insigne on

the envelope, and the official-looking letterhead, did suggest the document was authentic. Worse still, it already was the date in question, meaning she had a scant five hours at most before she was due to arrive. And that meant no time to inform Mirae of the sudden change in plans.

Lysette barely restrained an obscenity from passing her lips as she turned to Danitha.

*“Dani, I apologize for interrupting your Cultivation. I wanted to talk with you about this letter.”*

Danitha made no response at first, but after what was in fact about ten minutes but felt closer to half an hour, she opened her eyes and shook her head.

*“Lyse, I’m not sure whether to be grateful that you’re alive and well, or pissed with you for not even bothering to say goodbye before you left.”*

*“It was late when we had to leave, and I didn’t want to wake you. But I know, that’s just an excuse, not a good reason not to at least say I’m leaving. I could have left a note by your bed, or awoken you, even just sent you a telepathic message. I guess what I’m trying to say is that I screwed up and I’ve not been a good friend to you lately.”*

Danitha started laughing, a deep belly laugh.

“Is something I said funny?”

“A little bit, yes.” She switched back to telepathy. *“I’ve got a literal demigoddess walking into my bedroom and begging for my forgiveness.”*

“I may be what I am, but that doesn’t mean I can’t and shouldn’t admit my mistakes when I make them. If I can’t be contrite when needed, I can’t expect my believers to, either.”

Danitha laughed. “There’s a saying in my village: To err is human. To forgive is divine. Though, in light of new information, we might have to revise that statement. The divine are perfectly capable of erring.”

“And humans are perfectly capable of forgiving. Probably even better at it than divine beings, given the lack of these massive godly egos getting in the way.”

Danitha’s laugh turned into a full belly-laugh, choking and face-turning red from difficulty breathing for nearly a minute before she composed herself enough to take a full breath. She looked at Lysette’s dumbfounded expression, began laughing yet again, only finally stopping another two minutes later.

“I didn’t realize it was *that* funny,” Lysette said flatly.

“That’s precisely why it’s funny. By the way, new haircut?”

“Mirae styled it for me. Do you dislike it?”

“I didn’t take you for bangs. Guess you’re cultivating the whole ‘edgy and mysterious goddess who works in the shadows’ look?”

“A little. Also I’m trying to cover my left eye. It’s not fully healed yet.”

“Do I want to know?”

“Short explanation. Mirae and I found an artifact during our mission that grants some ability to see distant locations. Including what I believe to be the Celestial realm. So I did the only thing I could.”

“You... You didn’t, did you?”

“I did. Ripping it out wasn’t too bad, but grafting the stone back in was definitely in the top three most painful experiences I’ve ever gone through. Not sure if it hurt worse than grafting that teleportation matrix on my thigh. Going to assume so, except that I’m better acclimated to it now.”

“Only you would go through an experience like that and brush it off with such nonchalance.”

Lysette smiled. “Maybe so. If I may change the subject, it seems like I have to go up to the palace this morning. And I am not looking forward to it.”

Danitha shook her head. “Do you think they’re going to try something?”

“I’m leaving it as a possibility. The letter says it’s about my involvement in Elithria a couple of weeks ago and the information I gathered. But I am under no delusion that the palace isn’t going to try something. Or one of the nobles. I’ve certainly made enemies of quite a few.”

“You’re not thinking of fighting at the capital?” Danitha paused. “Are you?”

“Not if I can help it. But I’m not going to simply submit to arrest, imprisonment, or execution either. If I need to defend myself, I will. And that extends to you and Serrena and Mirae too.

“I’m worried about you three. I’m not saying that the palace will go after you all. But I also wouldn’t put it beneath them, either. If Philidor Dozel is willing to get involved in a conflict just because I fed his great-granddaughter a much-deserved helping of humble pie, then I feel it’s wisest to assume that others will as well. And Baron Albine is near the top of the list of people I expect to do something rash.”

“Do you want me to come with?”

“I’d appreciate that, but I suspect it’d be best if I go alone. As far as I know, the king thinks I’m the only one involved in the mission, and the last thing I want is to implicate anyone of you. Plus, if things do head in an ugly direction, I know between my shadow dissolution and teleportation that I can get out of nearly any situation.”

Lysette pondered. “Mirae went to the library, then to class this morning, and then we were going to meet up for lunch. I’d like you two to keep an eye on one another; I’m not saying it will

happen, but again, not going to disregard the possibility that the crown might hold you or them or any of my other friends hostage to force me to submit.”

“What about Serrena?” Danitha asked.

“I pity the individual who’s either dumb enough to try it or unlucky enough to get saddled with the assignment.”

“So, you want me to protect your partner? Is that it?”

“I want them to protect you. Mirae’s Domain awakened yesterday, and I think part of the reason they wanted to go to the library is to do the same research Serrena and I already did for ourselves.”

“You’re not going to help them?”

“A Domain isn’t just a source of power for a deity. It is something that a nascent deity must meditate on, understand completely, and act in accordance with. It is tied to the very core of their being, something which shapes their worldview. Even now, I only understand a fraction of what it means to act in accordance with my Reciprocity.

“I can’t tell Mirae what their Domain means, any more than they can speak to me about what my Reciprocity means to me. At best, I can give them some guidance on questions they can ask themselves while they meditate and Cultivate further. But they will have to do the same work that Serrena and I have already done, and continue to do.” Lysette paused. “Just as you will too, if you want to pursue the path of ascension.”

“Do you still want me to?” Danitha asked.

“If you do, Dani, I will assist you just like I did with Mirae. But I also don’t want to shoehorn you down that path either.”

“I appreciate it, Lyse.”

“Still friends?”

Dani shook her head. “I must admit, I’m a bit hurt that you needed to ask.”

Her stoic expression then turned to a smile and she wrapped Lysette in a hug. Lysette stood motionless in shock for a moment before reciprocating.

“But yes, yes we are. I know a lot has happened since we both started here, and you especially have gotten yourself involved in matters I could never have imagined on that day we first met. Sometimes I wonder how things would have been different. If I didn’t stop and wake you up along the trail while we were both traveling here. Or didn’t insist on being your roommate. Or didn’t stand up for you and get you involved in that first duel with Kiarra. Or didn’t come with you to meet Mirae and find out about you. Or anything else along the way.

“But I think... I think this was all supposed to happen. And I don’t want to regret any of it. Thanks to meeting you and Serrena and Mirae and everyone else, I feel like I’m in the best position to make the most of my life and these gifts I’ve been given. Even if I haven’t yet decided what exactly that will entail. I guess that’s one of the nice things about still being human, not knowing that part.”

Lysette laughed back. “I suppose you’re right. And, if worse comes to worst and something does happen where we can’t stay here at the Academy any longer, we’ll all rendezvous in Ciricu and decide what to do from there.”

“Good luck out there, Lyse. I’ll be praying for you.”

“For me, or to me?”

Danitha stuck out her tongue. “That’s for me to know and you to find out.”