

## Chapter 641 Negotiations

The woman glanced around the room again. “My trip was fine. It’s really not that long of a flight,” she said. “Tea?”

Donnavon chuckled. “Am I not the one who should offer?” he asked.

“I wouldn’t want you to get up for no reason,” Lilith said, the two cups suddenly appearing on the table.

*What. She teleported them. It’s true then. Space magic.*

“You seem surprised,” she said and poured the hot liquid into both cups.

“It’s a rare talent. I had speculated that it may be part of one of your Classes but it seems confirmed now. Space magic, am I right?” he asked.

Lilith drank from her mug, closing her eyes as she first sipped from the liquid and then downed the whole thing. “Tasty,” she exclaimed. “Yes, it’s space magic.”

Donnavon smiled, thanking her as he took the mug. Most adventurers had Heat Resistance abilities. For someone at her level, boiling tea would hardly pose a threat. “I will be honest with you, Lilith. I expected something different,” he said and drank from the tea.

***‘ding’ ‘You have been poisoned by Silk womb spice -328 health per second for one minute’***

“What... what’s the meaning of-” Donnavon said and coughed. He started healing himself but felt his mind wavering, his vision blurring. *Why would... did she?*

His mind suddenly cleared as if a bucket of cold water had been thrown onto him, a tide of incredible power flowing into him from all around. “What...,”

“You really didn’t know. No change in your heartbeat and you didn’t even hesitate drinking that tea,” Lilith said.

“No... it couldn’t be... it was you... with your space magic... you poisoned the tea,” he murmured, stumbling up as his chair fell down.

“Calm down,” the woman said, her head resting on her hands. The words flowed out with magic attached to them, the sounds reverberating in the room as if shouted.

***‘ding’ ‘You have heard the call of Lilith – You are paralyzed for five seconds’***

“Why would I poison you? Come on. I agreed to come into this room because it was such a laughably obvious trap. You’re the only reason I haven’t slaughtered everyone waiting outside yet,” Lilith spoke. “Sit down.”

Donnavon gulped, the chair that fell down back where it had stood before.

“Gods, you’re still unsure? Can you not see all the enchantments placed in the walls.

Reinforcements, Anti teleportation, even anti space magic, though those are fucking laughable. You should get better enchanter. And plenty of explosion things as well, remind me of the runes a friend uses. Plus a bunch of stuff I don’t know. All seems tied to an attempt to teleport or break out.

I guess in case the poison didn't kill me first. At least we really seem to have privacy. I'm not sure who they wanted to prevent from hearing us talk," the woman said.

It all clicked for Donnavon, his heart beat racing as his hands started shaking. The guards, the temple, the absence of the high clerics, the basement. But why? He gritted his teeth. He knew why. It was just as obvious as the rest had been. "Please, Lilith. You have to listen to me. Don't start this battle. I beg of you," he said and bowed as deeply as he could while sitting in his chair.

The woman grinned. "I already told you. I came in here because it seemed interesting. Honestly, I expected more from the Corinth Order. But to be fair, the experiences I made with your healers should've been a precedent. Also, you already started the battle. Technically... by poisoning this tea. I doubt you would've known about my preferences in that regard. It's way too weak."

Donnavon's mind raced. So far she seemed calm but he could tell that his woman wasn't joking. She had downed the poisoned tea, apparently knowing what it was. She was perfectly calm, knowing that all those Paladins and Inquisitors were waiting outside, ready to fight her. *She can kill them all. The stories were all true. And we just doomed our Order by dealing the first strike.*

*You have to calm down. She is still here but who knows how long she will stay. Hella, I pray you are by my side.*

"I didn't know," he said. "It was obvious all along now that I sit here but..." he gulped, trying to control his shaking hands. "I had never thought. A betrayal like this. It's... our leadership is not acting in the interest of our principles. Not anymore."

His eyes darted around as he tapped the desk. "This is an attempt on your life. But not just yours," he said.

"Yeah, I mean they don't seem to particularly like you either," the woman said and laughed.

"How can you stay so calm in this situation!" he blurted out. "We could die!"

"You could die," the woman stated. "I've not seen anything troublesome so far. Maybe if Michael was the one to orchestrate all this but he knows this would hardly be enough."

*Michael Elyse? How is he connected to this?* Donnavon thought and shook his head. "It's possible that they knew as well. The High Clerics are not here. Emilia either didn't know or she left immediately after closing that door. No... it's an attempt to kill you, but more so it's to kill me."

"Seems like they could've done so with a less convoluted plan, no offense," Lilith said as a meal appeared in her hands.

*I can't. What are you doing?!*

Donnavon forced himself to calm down, meditation and healing coursing through him. "Bryce, the head paladin of our Order. He listens to me... how devious. They wanted you to kill me."

"So that he attacks me? What's his level?" Lilith asked between bites.

He ringed with his thoughts and emotions. His principles were clear however. Evil must be defeated and so far Lilith had given him less reason to believe she was the enemy than his so called brothers and sisters. Those who had planned this terrible plot at least. "He's above level three hundred," he admitted finally. Perhaps he hoped his honesty would persuade her, or he hoped it would intimidate her, though the latter he thought unlikely.

"Like close to three hundred? Or much higher?" she asked.

“Close to,” Donnavon whispered. *I betrayed you, Bryce.*

“Sounds pretty boring then,” Lilith said. “You don’t have something higher? Some hidden leader who’s a four mark?”

“This is... ridiculous... our Paladins can challenge Shadows,” Donnavon deadpanned.

“Not exactly a testament of incredible strength. Why not retake Dawntree then? Sounds like you had the necessary people,” Lilith said.

*What is she planning? If I reveal more... no. She has not lied yet, I’m sure of it. I mustn’t break her trust. It’s the last hope I have.*

“Bryce chose to retreat to protect the survivors. We lost many in the chaos. The Paladins are the reason we made it to Kroll. There are discussions going on about an assault but some of the High Clerics and higher level Paladins are against it. We don’t have the numbers anymore. It’s paramount that we rebuild the Order here, instead of losing more people in a pointless war. Though it all depends on the Speaker,” Donnavon explained.

“Speaker your leader?” Lilith asked.

*How does she not know this?*

“Yes, Speaker Nathanael. Important decisions are voted on by the High Clerics but I’m sure he could push through near every decision at this point,” he said.

“Like an attempt to kill me, you in turn, and get the people still on the fence on his side? With a war against Ravenhall and the Sentinels?” Lilith suggested.

Donnavon nodded slowly. “It seems that is the case. Please, Lilith. I wish to find a way to prevent bloodshed. Too many Corinth healers have died already.”

“They tried to kill you too. Aren’t you a little angry? If you tell me where they are, I can take care of them right now,” Lilith said, her voice calm.

“I... was prepared to lose my life today. This is just... different than what I had expected. Those responsible must be found and judged but please... if you go out there and start killing, you will play right into their hands,” Donnavon said.

“Thought I’d open my maw and eat you?” she asked with a slight smirk.

Donnavon looked at the table. “Yes.”

“Well, now that you know I’m not a monster, maybe we can start over. Please call me Ilea,” she said with a smile.

“Start over? Start over what? This is... a diplomatic incident... Kroll could be brought into a war with Ravenhall. Surely Nathanael didn’t plan to just use our Order in this ordeal,” he murmured.

“I apparently have a tendency for creating diplomatic incidents. But right now we’re still just in this room. I’m sure your friends out there will wait for a while before they either manually activate the enchantments or check if we’re still alive in here,” the woman said. “You seem like a mostly decent fellow. I assume I’m talking to the new Speaker of the Corinth Order right now. Congratulations on your promotion.”

“The Speaker is chosen by the High Clerics,” Donnavon said slowly. *But she’s right. If a war breaks out and I chose to side with her, I’ll likely rise in influence after this is over. If she manages to win and with everything I’ve seen, she’s at least fully confident of being able to do so.*

“Well I don’t think there will be any left opposing this decision once we’re done,” Lilith or Ilea said.

“Even if that is the case, shouldn’t we have this talk after this situation is dealt with?” he asked.

Lilith shrugged. “Why? It’s going to be chaos one way or the other. It’s calm here, we have poison tea, enchantments threatening to blow you up, and about a hundred tense fanatics waiting out there for an emerging monster.”

Donnavon sat back, taking in a deep breath. “We’re not fanatics.”

Lilith just pointed at the surrounding walls, pouring herself another mug of tea before she sipped on it. “You were saying?”

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“Not all of us at least,” the man corrected himself.

“Good. So I received an invitation from your Healing Order. To be honest, I expected something like this but it turned out more productive than I thought,” she said.

“What did you expect then?” the man asked, nearly holding his breath.

***[Pure Healer – lvl 204]***

Many of the warriors waiting above were around his level, about half below two hundred. She had been surprised that nobody managed to pierce Monstrous, or they simply didn’t show a reaction.

She liked him. His long white hair, the wrinkles, his modest clothes, the tragic way he was betrayed by his fellow brothers and sisters. For the situation he was in, he remained pretty calm. Well his hands were shaking and his pulse was all over the place, but that was the least to be expected. He had come in here ready to die, killed by the monster he thought she was. And even now he wasn’t asking her to spare him, he was just trying to prevent a slaughter.

“A slaughter,” she answered. “But I’m glad I got to talk to one reasonable person before things went to shit. Without you here the outcome would’ve been very different,” she said and laughed. *Your plan backfired spectacularly. And now I have an inside man ready to spill the beans while pressured to find a diplomatic solution. Reminds me of a certain Truth related Order. Let’s just hope they’re not quite crazy enough to sacrifice the whole city.*

She refilled her mug and took a sip. “So what exactly is the problem you have with the Sentinels?”

His emotions showed on his face, warring opinions and thoughts surely going through his mind. “If you were a monster, it would be unacceptable to tolerate your existence as a healing order.”

“Organization,” Ilea corrected.

“Organization then. Have you murdered fellow humans? Innocent people?” the man asked, his eyes hard.

*Brave, are we?* she thought, leaning back. “I’ve killed dozens of soldiers, likely just following orders. I’ve killed people who attacked me, even though they posed little danger to me. I’ve killed slavers, because they were cruel to their subjects, and I’ve killed nobles who upheld slavery. I’ve killed many creatures, High Cleric, and I don’t think I regret any of it.

“But if you’re asking me if I go around killing people for fun, torturing them because of sadistic tendencies, or if I plan to sacrifice entire cities to fuel blood magic rituals, then no. I don’t condone anything like that. There is a possibility that I’ve killed creatures more intelligent than I thought they were, monsters close to their awakening or simply living peacefully in a dungeon until an unknown invader came into their home. With creatures that can’t communicate in any way and attack at first sight, it’s kill or be killed,” she said.

The man looked at her for a long moment before he sighed. “You don’t seem entirely lost.”

“Wonderful. I’m glad I have your moral validation,” she said between sips.

“There is no need for your mockery,” the Cleric retorted. “I’m aware of the irony in this situation. But as you don’t seem to be bothered by the current circumstances, I will treat this as the meeting I was sent to have. As I understand, the Sentinels are meant to be battle healers?”

“Indeed,” Ilea said.

“Ridiculous,” he murmured, shaking his head.

“What are your Paladins then?” Ilea asked.

“Warriors of our gods, trained from a young age and sent out to kill monsters, both human and not,” he said.

“Well, for starters we don’t brainwash children. So that will have to stop if you plan to keep any semblance of power. Plenty of older volunteers who would love a chance to become righteous Paladins or healers, I’m sure,” Ilea said.

“I thought we were negotiating,” he said.

Ilea downed the tea and relaxed in her chair. “Donnavon, I like you. But you seem a little... let’s say, stuck in your ways. So either we find a middle ground somewhere, or I fly into the royal palace, explain the circumstances of my visit and then I massacre every single idiot who planned to foolishly assassinate me. And those who try to stop me.” she said. Ilea was sure they could find a more diplomatic solution but he needed a bit of a reality check. “No children trained to be killing machines. Orphanages are fine but be careful what you teach them. It’s the reason something like this has happened,” she added and gestured around them.

“You generalize,” he murmured. “But I agree that there are plenty of people ready to join either way. It will be difficult to ascertain their sincerity and intent but we can handle that.”

“I’m sure you can,” Ilea said. “We do the same and it’s a possibility that people slip through anyway. I still think brainwashed kids are a far greater danger, no matter who does the brainwashing and what you put in their heads.”

“What is the goal of your organization?” Donnavon asked, leaning forward as he sighed.

“Have them kill monsters, join adventuring teams, teach healing magic and medicine where possible. Hopefully not place them behind walls. Plenty of Orders for that already,” she said. “As to your comment on battle healers being ridiculous... you did identify me right?”

He chuckled to himself now, covering his face with both hands before he relaxed a little. “You’re right. I simply didn’t expect it. Perhaps it’s because of what I was taught, and what I’ve been teaching for the last few decades. Healers and warriors should not intermingle. You’re proof that we were wrong. And if those are truly the goals of your organization, I don’t see an issue, especially because your... battle healers can take care of themselves.”

“I’m curious,” Ilea said. “Why weren’t battle healers considered? I assume your Paladins have very limited healing abilities.”

“Tradition,” Donnavon said. “Generations of Clerics and Speakers teaching the ways of the Corinth Order.”

“Ever heard of the Azarinth Order?” Ilea asked. *No obvious reaction.*

“I can’t say I have,” he said, thinking on it for a moment.

“They were battle healers once. Powerful enough to fight alongside the Taleen and Elven domains. Or so it goes,” she explained. “I wonder how much their influence affected the Healing Orders coming after.”

*At least the Ascended would’ve likely not wanted more of them around. Same with the Domains if they took more of an interest in human affairs back then. The Taleen as well.*

“May I ask? Are you one of their members? I had thought you young, but appearances are often deceiving,” he said.

Ilea smiled. “I’m not part of their Order. I don’t think it’s still around, though it’s not impossible.”

She decided not to share anything about her previous Classes. If anybody would tolerate a high death rate to get powerful healers out of it, it was an Order doing the work of their Gods.

“Your organization may not be directly competing with ours, but your fast growth will put pressure on all of our members,” Donnavon said, returning to the topic at hand.

Ilea just shrugged. “Good. Maybe that pressure will help you innovate and grow. We’re happy to trade various resources and information. Now it’s my turn to ask, beyond the vague goal of purging monsters and evil, what is it the Corinth Order intends to do?”

He smiled. “Is it not enough to stand up as humans and choose to fight the fate bestowed on our species? To heal those in need? And to find salvation in prayer?”

“Seems like you’re fighting more humans than anything else,” Ilea said.

“A regrettable state of affairs,” Donnavon admitted. “Affairs I’m sure could be changed if those corrupting our ranks from within could be removed.”

“You don’t condone the killing of humans?” she asked, raising her brows.

“Traitors to our very gods, ready to start a war where hundreds could die, for what? An inflated ego? A misguided wish to purge what they see as evil? No. They will be judged, and sent to the gods they claimed to believe in,” he said and sighed. “I came here to judge if you indeed are the

monster we believed you to be. But the enemy has been walking by my side all along. I'm deeply ashamed, Ilea," he said and paused. "I was informed that you are part of the Shadow's hand."

"I'm still a member technically," Ilea said.

"Good. I'm sure our Order can manage to pay a single Shadow," he said.

"It'll be a premium fee," Ilea said with a smile. "What's the job?"