

Chapter 612 A Hunter must hunt

“During one of the battles I had with a Bluetail, we ended up crashing on a mountain side. I saw one of the Vrayar protect its nest, using its soul magic to scare both me and the Bluetail away. Not particularly effective of course,” Kyrian explained as he watched the eagle like birds rip into the flesh. “The mother died.”

“You took them in?” Ilea asked.

He nodded to himself. “I tried before... fostering some kind of pet. None of them stayed, or just never stopped trying to eat me.”

Ilea summoned one of Keyla’s meals and handed it to him. “Do you want to eat here?”

“Why not?” he asked and sat down on the carcass, the steel on his head moving away to reveal his face. His hair had the same black color, short now and roughly cut, a short beard covering the lower half of his face. He had the same gray eyes, not quite as inhuman as Elfie’s but they were certainly unique. Ilea wondered if it was just her imagination but she felt that they looked colder.

The man formed a fork with steel from his gauntlet and started eating, closing his eyes a moment later as he ate faster. He made a few questionable noises before he was done.

“More?” Ilea asked with a smile, summoning another bowl and displacing it with the empty one he was holding.

He glanced at her and ate again. “Thank you,” he got in between bites.

“Sure, plenty more where that is coming from. Maybe I can get you a storage item too. It’s really quite a god sent when you can summon your favorite food in the middle of a months long dungeon dive,” Ilea said.

Kyrian finished and wiped at his mouth before his helmet closed again. “I found one here. Plenty of really old clothes, weapons, books, and the like in the keeps. Problem is, I can’t read the language,” he said and summoned a book before he made it vanish again.

One of the eagles flapped its wings and landed on his shoulder, gray beak dripping with blood, some clinging to its feathers.

Ilea felt the soul magic as the creature watched her. “They’re pretty cool.”

“They are,” Kyrian said and looked at the Vrayar. “You are, aren’t you?” he asked in a dry tone, tapping the beak of the creature. “The magic doesn’t bother you? I’m pretty sure it’s not meant as an attack.”

“It’s some kind of perception. Just invasive,” Feyrair said. “Seithir could offer more insight.”

“A soul mage Cerithil Hunter,” Ilea explained.

“That would be useful, sure,” Kyrian said. “Thank you for the food, Ilea. I can’t wait to fill my ring with everything I can get my hands on back in Ravenhall... the city IS still around? Or did someone summon more demons?”

“It is,” Ilea said, her smile gone now.

“What is it?” he asked.

Ilea walked up next to him and sat down on the carcass, one of her ashen limbs cutting out a bit of flesh and feeding it to the closest Vrayar. “A few... days ago. I found out who killed Eve.”

He turned his head forward, remaining silent for a while.

Ilea could see his curse aura flare up again, lashing out before it was subdued, the birds croaking and flying away before they landed on nearby ledges, window sills, or the ground.

Kyrian took a deep breath in and let the air out slowly. “I’m sorry,” he said and turned towards her, his body floating to close the distance before he hugged her again. Again, they remained for a little while before he lifted his head. “How are you feeling?”

Ilea turned her head when he let go of her, looking at the ground as the birds approached again to resume their feast. “I don’t know.”

“Come, let’s go somewhere a little more comfortable than this cold courtyard. Whoever built this at least knew about furniture and hearths,” he said and stood up, holding his hand out to help her up.

Ilea looked at it, swallowing empty. *Didn’t I come here to save you?*

She smiled finally, tears in her eyes as she grabbed his hand.

The hall he had brought them to was made for kings. Ancient tapestries hung from the wall, all color long faded, much of it eaten through by moths. A massive hearth had been set into the center of the wall, a long banquet table standing in front of it. Much of the table was missing.

Kyrian’s arm extended into an axe like form before he brought it down with a quick swing, throwing the chunk of wood into the hearth, adding fuel to the bright fire.

Ilea felt cold, despite her resistances and powerful body. She didn’t feel like using Heart of Cinder, instead sitting in a half rotten chair near the hearth.

Feyrair sat nearby, holding a large chunk of bloody Bluetail meat while he shooed off one of the Vrayar.

She patted the closest bird on its head, feeling the rough feathers against her skin. *Higher leveled than most Shadows*, she thought, looking at the creature before she turned back to the flames.

“I’m glad the war is over,” Kyrian said, choosing to stand with his arms crossed in front of him.

He looked tall. Powerful. Like an experienced hunter. This place had given him an edge Ilea felt more naturally than identify could ever show. And yet when he moved and spoke, he seemed vulnerable, much like the Kyrian she knew.

They had spent the last hour talking. First about Eve, about Michael and who he was, why Ilea had chosen not to go after him. She talked about the war, the Lily, Erendar, and Meadow. About the Sentinels and what they meant, about Claire and Trian, and what they were up to.

He sighed, tossing another chunk of wood into the flames. “A lot seems to have changed since I was teleported away.”

“Not as much as you think,” Ilea said. “Even though Ravenhall is independent now, you’ll hardly find it different than before. Few people know about Hallowfort yet, let alone Meadow.”

Most of the news had been good. A prospering Ravenhall, alliances with powerful cities, a space magic tree that would help them if need be. The end of the Baralia war.

“What are you thinking?” she asked the man, his gaze focused on the flames as she looked at him.

Kyrian turned towards her before he glanced at Feyrair. “I... I wasn’t there, you know? I was lost here. And now you’re here. You can take me back, but what then? I’m not a Sentinel, not a Hunter. I’m a Shadow, if even that,” he said, the last words whispered.

“What the hell are you talking about?” Ilea asked, standing up from her chair.

He remained where he stood but turned his head to the fire.

“Why do you think I came here?” Ilea asked.

“We helped Edwin and Felicia. You came for me because it was part of the mission,” he said.

Ilea stepped in front of him so that he would’ve had to move to avoid her gaze. “I came because of you, Kyrian. Because we’re part of the same team. Because we fought together, because we bled together, because we trained and laughed together. I didn’t come here because of a mission that is long past. You didn’t need my help either, you would’ve escaped on your own. Maybe in a month, maybe a year,” she said and tapped his chest with her index finger. “I came because I was worried.”

“I see... I’m sorry,” he said.

“There’s nothing to apologize for,” Ilea said. “Whatever you want to do, we’ll be with you. Yes, Claire is mostly managing Ravenhall, but she hasn’t forgotten about you. She was the one to ask Cless for paintings of you. Trian found something in leading and training the Sentinels. If you want to join him in doing that, he’ll be happy to work with you, I’m sure. And if you want to travel with me, you can do that too.”

She flicked his metal forehead, the sound dull as neither her finger nor his head gave in. “Kyrian, you’re one of the most powerful human beings I know. You can do whatever the fuck you want. And we’ll be there.”

He remained quiet for a while until he cleared his throat.

“I think I want to visit Ravenhall. I want to see the others... I want to... listen to music again, want to see the sunlight without arcane storms and blizzards raging past. I want to feel the warmth, want to sleep in a comfortable bed, and I want to fly, past the mountains of the south, the forests of the west,” he said, raising his hand slowly before he flicked her forehead instead.

She felt the impact slam into her skull, his finger stopped just like hers had.

“And I want to hunt. I want to kill every last Bluetail, every last Wyrn, every gods forsaken Golem and Gargoyle on these damned isles. And then, I want to hunt those responsible for stranding me here. I did not... have a good time,” he said, his voice shaking as it reverberated through the hall.

Feyrair appeared behind the metal mage, steel spikes instantly extending to keep the elf at bay. He casually put his arm around Kyrian’s shoulder and grinned, sharp canines visible. “You, my friend, need to learn about anger.”

“Take your hand off me,” Kyrian said, his aura flaring up.

Feyrair spun away, sliding to a stop with a grin as his armor formed.

“Don’t,” Ilea said to him. “You’ll have enough time to beat each other’s skulls in.”

Ash flowed out from her back, covering her body in a thick layer of armor, horns sprouting from her head as wings formed on her back. “I think. We need something a little more, satisfying. And I just happened to have heard so much about a certain Northern Bluetail.”

The elf hissed, white flame bursting from his body as his eyes glowed with magic.

Ilea displaced the three of them up and out into the open, her wings moving slowly to keep herself in the air. The suns were setting in the distance, a deep red coloring the skies.

“Your friends are waiting, are you sure you want to go out now?” Kyrian asked.

“I’m sure they can occupy themselves for a little while,” Ilea said. “So where can we get a few but not a whole swarm?” she asked, looking around.

There were four mountains she could see on the isle from the elevated position of the keep, including the one they were on. “Where’s the volcano you mentioned before?”

Kyrian floated in the air nearby, pointing to the peak of the mountain. “You can’t see it from here. Come, I’ll show you,” he added and shot off.

Not using his spheres anymore. Is he just straight up hovering his armor?

The three reached the top in less than a minute, Ilea landing next to the metal mage. “Oh shit,” she murmured, seeing the line of isles that stretched into the horizon, some having kilometers of ocean between them. The largest one consisted of a single broad mountain, not quite as high reaching as some of the others but simply massive in size. More importantly, it had lava pouring down its side, smoke rising from its top.

“The Krahen Isles,” Kyrian said.

Ilea saw the swarms of Bluetails in the distance, a group of about twenty diving for the water, vanishing a moment later. The mountain tops were covered in snow, dark clouds still clinging to the lower parts of the isles, their arcane lightning flashing in the evening light.

“Come, I set up a trap close by,” Kyrian said.

“I thought you could fight them head on?” Feyrair teased.

Kyrian laughed. “It’s about attracting stragglers. How I kill them has little to do with it. If you want to rush into a swarm, feel free to try. I’ll tell your story in the next inn I visit.”

He rushed down the mountain, his flying speed surprising Ilea a little. She wondered if he was faster than even her if he really tried.

They quickly reached a plateau on the side of the mountain, stone rubble, steel chains, and fallen trees in the vicinity. The metal mage landed with a heavy impact, walking to the center of a runic circle before he summoned his chain flails. They moved out, dragging over the ground, clearing away all the rubble and even tree trunks with a swift motion, dust and chunks of stone fanning out from the gesture.

“You don’t have to hold the chains at all?” Ilea asked.

The man glanced her way as he summoned a few steel spheres that split into thousands of needles. They rushed out in a flurry, scratching into the ground to repaint the large runic circle that may have been damaged. “No. But I can apply a stronger curse if I do. And just add momentum to more physical attacks.”

She watched him work, the complex curse circle reminding her of the blood rituals in Baralia. He just set it up alone and in a matter of seconds. *How fast could Michael do it? I do wonder.*

“Just in case we attract a dangerous one,” he said. “Are you two ready?”

Ilea saw how he scanned the skies, settling on a small group of about six Bluetails. She thought about using Monster Hunter but that would likely attract more than one.

Did he get another General skill for that? Or what is he going to do.

“I’m ready,” Ilea said and ascended, watching the metal mage do the same. His chained flails floated close to him.

Feyrair was still burning, hissing his affirmation.

“That’s a yes,” Ilea clarified.

“I figured,” Kyrian said in a dry tone as he grabbed one of his chains and started swinging it with one arm. The massive flail end swung around, at least eight meters away from where he held the steel links.

No wonder he destroyed those Guardians. That end bit has like a one meter fifty diameter.

She just watched as the momentum increased, the massive object creating an eerie sound as it pushed against the air.

And then he let go, the main chunk flying off with a rattling chain pulled behind.

“I don’t know what I expected,” Ilea murmured, watching the thing fly into the distance. A hundred meters, two, five. She wasn’t about to question the sanity of her friend but he had been alone for several years.

And then it happened. She barely saw the tiny flail when one of the flying birds was suddenly snapped out of the air, its wings twisted up as it twirled and fell. “Holy shit.”

“Impressive throw,” Feyrair said, his excitement palpable. “Now we go to where it lands?”

Kyrian raised his right arm, a pulse of magic rushing out before the flight direction of the Bluetail suddenly changed. It came straight towards them.

“Won’t the others come for us?” Ilea asked.

“I think they’re very competitive creatures. Sometimes a few come check, but usually they’re more than content leaving a few of their own behind,” he said. “Not that they won’t swarm you if you get too close, because they will. Now let me do my work before you start obliterating everything. This one is mine.”

Feyrair laughed. “What if it’s a four mark?” he asked.

“We would already know,” Kyrian said, grabbing two more chains before he started to swing them much like he did that first.

Ilea saw the creature better now, the flail embedded in one of its wings as it flailed in the air, the chain around its body preventing one of its legs from moving freely. She could already see the familiar sight of air blades, a torrent of water rushing out from the creature's maw.

Kyrian threw the two remaining chain flails, the weapons entirely wrapping around the approaching Bluetail a few seconds later, a few of the spikes piercing. "Caught a weak one. Close to six hundred," he said, spreading his arms as his remaining three weapons convulsed in the air unlike anything steel should really ever do. Sheets of the material wrapped around his body, adding layer after layer of both weight and metal, his form now at least half a meter taller and broader.

[Northern Bluetail – lvl ???]

Ilea knew he had been right. "Six thirty or so."

"How do you know?" Kyrian asked, his voice barely audible under all that metal.

"It's the third tier of Veteran," she said and winked.

"Hah," the mage said as he slowly raised his hand, bringing down the caught creature, the ball of furious Bluetail and steel coming down hard, sliding on the side of the mountain before it all came to a stop a few dozen meters away from the curse circle.

I don't think he'll need that one, Ilea thought as she watched him float closer, stopping about fifteen meters in front of the monster's massive head.

It screeched, the call doing nothing to intimidate its captor. Instead it formed a spell, a stream of highly pressurized water rushing out to hit the mage.

Ilea could feel the power gathering in Kyrian's form.

He lifted his arm, a wave of curse magic rushing out to meet the creature's ability, the stream's integrity suddenly wavering before the water splattered to the ground without even reaching him. His steel armor twisted, a single wedge forming at the whole front of his body. And then he vanished. Or seemed to.

Ilea could barely keep up as Kyrian flew straight into the monster's maw. The result was an explosion of gore, blood, and bones. He came to a stop at the other end of the Bluetail, having nearly entirely split it apart. Nothing was left of the head as the remains fell aside, one wing flapping one last time before it hit the ground.

The man teleported out of the large carcass, steel peeling off and reforming into the previously used weapons as he recalled the his other three flails.

Feyrair clapped. "Wonderful presentation."

"Have to agree. I did similar things before but it just seems better with steel," Ilea said. "I'll have to explain to you why a drill is far superior to a wedge though."

"So who wants the next one?" Kyrian asked as he started to twirl one of his weapons.