

Chapter 789 Signatures

Ilea flew above the estate, looking at the various alleyways all around before she sighed and landed in the extensive garden.

“Find anything?” she sent to Kyrian.

He was the only one of the Accords still standing outside, eyes scanning the flowerbeds, bushes, and exotic trees.

Ilea followed his gaze, frowning slightly as she smelled the copious amounts of different herbs and flowers. Dozens of different kinds, various colors and shapes, thorns, roots, pellets, and leaves of varying shapes and make.

“A hunch more than anything. But I didn’t want to destroy the garden,” he sent back. *“Are you sure you saw someone?”*

“I followed her here. Mind mage with illusion magic. She appeared in a secret entrance that lead into the estate. Behind a heavily enchanted brick wall,” she said, checking the space around her.

“And then you lost her?” Kyrian asked as he glanced at her. He raised a brow. *“Really?”*

“There were traps,” she said.

He just shook his head. Likely lost as to why that was relevant.

“With poisons,” she added.

“Ah. I get it,” he sent. *“Anything interesting among them?”*

“Probably quite advanced for the human plains. But no, not really,” she answered. *“By the time I tested them all and realized something was wrong with the wall, the woman was gone. No more teleportation either. She realized I was tracking her with that.”*

“Rare combination of magic,” he sent.

Ilea was quiet for a while, looking at the garden. A warm breeze flowed through, the leaves moving in the wind. *“Yeah.”*

“You don’t think...” he said, glancing her way before he focused back on the yard.

“No. I would’ve noticed. We talked for a moment. Her spells were different too,” she sent. *“Just a coincidence.”*

“I know,” Kyrian said before he sighed.

Wayland appeared nearby and walked over, his eyes scanning the surroundings. *“Damn smells,”* he muttered. *“You saw a spy?”*

“Yes. Mind mage and illusionist. Two twenty one. Experienced,” she said and added how she had met and followed the woman.

“They won’t know much more than what everyone saw on the streets,” Wayland said. *“I’ll make sure there’s nobody hiding in the estate. Intriguing though. Managed to get away from Lilith.”*

“She was testing poisons,” Kyrian said.

“Distractions, yes. That would be the most viable way to deal with her,” Wayland said as he glanced at Ilea. “I would’ve chosen a brewery followed by a feast, maybe some powerful monsters if available.”

“Would a spymaster really share his ways to deal with me, if he had to?” Ilea asked, looking at him.

“No,” he said with a slight smirk. “I’ll get to work then. The meeting starts in a few minutes.”

Ilea nodded, seeing him vanish as she returned her attention to the smells and sights around her.

Kyrian walked over and put a hand on her ash covered shoulder.

They stood in silence for a while, until he squeezed. “Come on. Let’s go.”

She nodded and lightly punched his arm. “Another meeting. Kind of want to go back to Kohr and fight some abominations.”

“They know you. Our presence will make things smoother. Let’s get dinner afterwards,” he said. “Somewhere in the city.”

“How about in a cave?” she asked.

“Got something specific in mind?” Kyrian said.

“Yes,” she said and focused on Walter’s mark. “*Visit for dinner later? I’ll bring a few friends.*”

“*Of course. After sundown. I’ll prepare something,*” came the answer.

Great, she thought and smiled. “Also, what do you mean Our presence. You don’t know them.”

“I’m a three mark human,” Kyrian said.

“Oh, sorry, Mr. Important,” Ilea joked, raising her hands in a defensive gesture.

“Cowering on the floor might make me forgive you,” he said in a dry tone.

Ilea smirked. “Aliana isn’t teaching you the proper manners, I see.”

He couldn’t keep the smile off his face. “Oh, she is. But you’re not Aliana.”

“Cute,” Ilea said as they entered the large three story mansion. Dark marble made up most of the walls and floors, paintings, armor displays, and vases with delicate flora displayed decorating the entrance hall. Two sets of broad stairs led up to the first floor, an enchanted chandelier hanging down from above, illuminating the hall in changing patterns of blue light.

She could hear the sound from outside being shut out the moment the heavy wooden double doors closed behind her, various enchantments flaring to life as her sphere was cut off. *Very wealthy, this one*, she thought. “*Why was this place chosen? If a spy knows a secret entrance, shouldn’t we go somewhere more trustworthy?*”

Kyrian glanced at her as they walked past the stairs and into the large dining hall beyond, two Shadowguard standing next to the open doors. “*The Taleen arrived in a public area. Every spy worth their gold will know about this meeting by the end of the day. I think it’s a display of power by the Accords, to do this in a known location. It might also be a way for Alistair to test the loyalty of a noble in his city. You could ask Claire, if you’re interested.*”

“*Not really,*” Ilea said as she walked over to the expansive buffet. She smiled at some of the dwarves that were there as well, gingerly filling their plates as they tried not to look excited. “Try this one,” Ilea whispered to one of them, pointing at a baked fillet dish she had tried before.

“Thank you, Lilith,” the dwarf said with a smile, adding a piece to his plate.

People were still mingling, various small groups having formed with representatives of the various factions talking to the Taleen. Ilea stopped listening in when she realized the mundane nature of their conversations.

Politics.

“*Feel like a bout?*” she sent to Kyrian.

He smiled. “*We’ve been here for less than two minutes. Grab some food and sit down.*”

She rolled her eyes but did as he suggested, joining a few sitting dwarves before she ate in silence.

The meeting commenced soon, the doors closed now and enchantments in place to prevent information from getting out.

This time, she paid little mind to the talks. Compared to the meeting with the Accords, these were actual negotiations. Detailed deals were presented, modified, and accepted. Some only after lengthy debates between the various factions involved.

The main goal of the Accords were to provide a network of trade, resources, and security to its members. A lot of it was already defined, but the Taleen wanted more details to be added, both in regards to what they would be able to provide, and what they would receive in return. It was mostly Ormont and the older dwarves that talked, though it was clear most of the others would’ve accepted the initial deal already.

“*This seems way more complicated than when the Pit joined,*” she sent to Claire during a long monologue from one of the Taleen.

“*Helwart had clear demands and they wanted access to the gates. The Taleen are not so easily swayed, and as you said, those who were around during their height of power are both adept in diplomacy and know what their people are capable of. This is not as one sided as most of our previous negotiations, even those with the Empire of Lys,*” Claire explained.

Ilea rested her head on her arm, still occasionally teleporting some food from the buffet to her plate. Nobody complained. The benefit of being an influential figure. She wondered if anyone thought it disrespectful, or if they were just envious that she could eat during the frankly boring declarations of goods to be traded, metals to be provided, access to cities, mines, education.

The Taleen were aware of the value their expertise would bring to an alliance. Despite the fact that only the Accords could provide them with quick access to the teleportation networks, Ormont still pushed quite far, even suggesting negotiations with other available factions that would provide military support in exchange for their knowledge. The teleportation gates were even used as a way to pressure the Accords, knowing they could share their own technology with factions desperate to replicate what they had abbreviated from the Taleen.

“*You’re a ruthless fuck,*” Ilea sent to Ormont when one of the Builders was talking about materials.

He didn’t look at her but smiled ever so slightly. “*It is a ruthless world, young healer. But I am still here, and I’m inclined to accept these deals. Know that your candor has played a major role in that.*”

“Oh I’m greatly honored mighty Maker,” Ilea said as she ate another pastry.

“Perhaps I can sit back and enjoy some of this wonderful food your people have provided, once we’re done,” he said.

Ilea started to meditate as she stopped listening entirely. Lists of goods, requirements, education levels. It wasn’t that she wasn’t interested at all, she was just tired of it. And she trusted everyone here to make better decisions on the matters than she ever could. Her presence was simply required as a form of respect. She hoped she didn’t go too far with her comments sent to the dwarf, but she assumed he understood her well enough. If anything they would confirm his assumptions about her.

She did just want there to be less conflict and war. She did just want their people to have nice food. And she did just want people to learn from each other. Ilea was just annoyed that talking all of that out took as long as it did.

Finally, after what felt like centuries, the parties got together and signed their contracts.

Ilea took in a deep breath and sighed.

“I’m surprised at the swift conclusion,” Catelyn said. *“It would be more than acceptable if you wished to discuss these contracts in the coming days or even weeks.”*

Ormont smiled. *“I understand that we are both to profit from this endeavor. The Accords have been more than forthcoming in these dealings. We do not wish to prolong the lack of opportunities for our people.”*

Swift?

Forthcoming?

Ilea had more than four question marks floating around in her mind but she tried to distract herself with some potato salad.

“It is customary for the contracts to be signed in the presence of the Meadow. And we require a vote of every faction to include yours in turn. Is such a journey acceptable?” Catelyn asked.

“Where would the Meadow be?” Ormont asked.

“Far north, below the settlement of Hollowfort,” Catelyn said. *“We may use the teleportation network but a more comfortable option exists. One that would allow you to return here quickly after.”* She looked to Ilea. *“If that is available?”*

“It is,” she said. *“Let me check to make sure a suitable barrier is set up.”* Ilea stood up, still eating from her plate as she walked through a gate. *“Heya. The Taleen and Accords want to sign their contracts here. Can you set something up? I’ll have them walk through a gate.”*

“Of course. Give me thirteen seconds,” the Meadow sent.

Ilea bowed as she chewed and stepped back through, the gate closing behind her. *“Thirteen seconds,”* she said, the representatives waiting in silence as she ate and counted down the time in her head. *“Okay. There you go,”* she raised her arm and summoned the gate. *“Move it up, the mana cost is insane.”*

She set one of the gate locations in the mansion, occasionally recasting the spell to save on the exponential mana cost increase.

Everyone through, she went herself, arriving in a dome like barrier, flowers and trees all over with a circular stone platform and a large table at the center. *“You transformed the entire area.”*

“Yes,” the Meadow sent. *“And I will transform it back after this is done.”*

“Greetings, representatives of the Taleen, to my domain,” it spoke.

“Greetings, Endless Meadow,” Ormont spoke and bowed. *“We have heard much, but I did want to see you myself.”*

“Let us commence then,” the Meadow sent.

Ilea finished her plate before she sat down at the large round table, watching the others take their places. The extensive contracts floated now, moving past each of the representatives who left their signatures. She smiled at the barely concealed amazement in the dwarves. Even having known the One without Form, having made the very machines meant to face and destroy elven kind, they were still awed by the Meadow.

“The original contracts will be stored here, and protected. Every faction will receive copies,” the Meadow spoke when the last signature had been written down. *“I welcome you to the Accords, Taleen of Io.”*

“You never not impress,” Ilea sent to the tree.

“I understand they were not quite as forthcoming in their negotiations as some of the other factions. Three mark humans, teleportation gates, control of their ancient army, and myself... perhaps all of it was needed to even get them to the table,” the Meadow answered. *“They are proud, and ancient. Let us hope they are honorable too, and provide just as much in return as they have claimed they would.”*

“I mean it’s not like we’re strapped for resources,” Ilea said.

“Says the inventory manager of the Accords,” the tree sent.

“Fair. But Aki is part of it now too. I assume we’re doing pretty well,” she said.

“We are. Compared to every civilization I have the necessary data on for a meaningful comparison. However Aki tells me the Taleen weren’t exactly wanting either, before their imprisonment and even now,” the Meadow spoke.

“This concludes the signing, and thus inclusion of the Taleen into the Accords,” Catelyn said.

“Thank you for the swift procedures, Guilds of Io. We shall commence with the meeting here to discuss the specifics of fulfilling your requests, including any other points that remained open during our last session,” she said and glanced at everyone present. *“Those who do not wish to participate are free to leave, as is written. Your votes will be given to your chosen representatives.”*

“That would be me,” Ilea said and stood up, stretching as some of the people looked her way. A few of the Hallowfort council got up too, as did plenty of the dwarves of the Pit.

Kyrian joined as well, as did some of the Guild members from the Taleen.

“As members of the Accords, you are now free to travel using our teleportation network. I advise you to remain within allied cities until the various kingdoms and empires of the Plains have been informed of your addition,” the Meadow informed.

“Those who want to get back to the estate in Riverwatch can join me now,” Ilea said. “I’ll be here again when the meeting ends to transport the rest if they wish.”

A sizable group joined her, those from Hallowfort vanishing with help of the Meadow.

The Taleen seemed excited now, the mood elated. Ilea could tell the only ones remaining composed were the old guard of the Taleen, those who were around before the One without Form. *Not like they had much of a choice with their speedy decision. Not if they didn’t want to be overthrown.* She could understand that much at least. Their offer was too good to be ignored, for anyone but a proud ancient empire. She summoned her gate and walked through, followed by the rest of the delegates that didn’t further participate in the meeting.

The gate closed as she took in a deep breath.

“The Meadow...” one of the Taleen muttered.

“Quite an impressive piece of wood, eh?” one of the war machines spoke before bellowing. “Now that you’re part of the Accords. What do you think of this?” He spread his arms as various compartments on his war machine moved, revealing hooks, weapons, and gears.

One of the younger Taleen walked over and squinted. “Some of us learned about war machines. The idea is older than our Guardians, but this is more advanced than what we saw. I’m part of the Guild of Builders, call me Marun. Is it possible to look at the enchantments and greenprints?”

“Greenprints? You mean the building plans? Of course... I own several smithies and war machine facilities in the Pit. You are invited, as is everyone else who would like to join,” the heavy machine said.

“I’ll stay here and look at the suns for a while,” one of the Taleen said, arms crossed as she made her way towards the double doors.

“Excuse me, Lilith?” one of them said, a young dwarf with piercing green eyes and long brown hair. She wore a white robe with a variety of metal runes embedded into the fabric. “I am Caria, Guild of Healers.”

Ilea looked at the dwarf and smiled, ignoring the conversations sparking up all around, plenty of people already forming groups, others leaving alone. Kyrian stayed with her. “What can I do for you, Caria?”

The dwarf smiled. “You are quite an impressive specimen. To reach the five hundreds as a human is... perhaps unheard of. I don’t think I have come across anything like it in our records, though of course the Guardian did censor quite a bit of information. I have seen and heard of your Sentinels, though only what I could gather in the little time we have been here.”

Ilea grinned. “Yes. I’m already booked for the rest of the day, but let me see if I can arrange something. Our Headquarters are in Ravenhall. I’m sure one of the faculty and at least a Hunter level Sentinel will be happy to show you around.” She walked outside and into the garden, followed by the Healer and Kyrian. “*Vienna?*” she sent to one of the Sentinels guarding the estate.

The woman appeared in front of her with one knee to the ground. “*Lilith.*”

“This is Caria, Taleen and part of the Guild of Healers. Do you have time to introduce her to the Sentinels and maybe some of the faculty in Ravenhall?” Ilea asked.

“It would be an honor,” Vienna spoke as she stood up and bowed to the dwarf. She signaled with her hand before her group appeared.

Caria gave her a look and smiled. “We have much to learn, it seems. It seems unlikely the Azarinth would have allowed for an Order such as yours to exist.”

“The Azarinth are gone,” Ilea spoke. “We can do whatever we want.” She smiled at the woman and turned to Kyrian. “*Shall we?*”