

Chapter 848 Root

Malise wasn't surprised when she entered the training hall, her team in a loose formation around her as they followed the Centurion to meet the Headmaster and Lilith.

The woman looked nice enough. Long black hair, blue eyes, seeming more entertained than really interested in the affairs happening around her. *But then how interested could she be in a group of below level one hundred recruits, when she faces monsters we couldn't even comprehend on a daily basis.*

Lilith obviously didn't care to make an impression with her clothes and accessories. Malise had met few powerful people like that, but what she learned was that they usually were the most dangerous. Uncaring for the perception of others, and thus one fewer avenues to gauge and manipulate them. Lilith would not be prone to flattery, or gifts. What she had on the woman was information. Songs and hearsay, though she trusted more in the stories she heard from the Sentinels than the words in a random song played in a faraway tavern. The fact that the Sentinel stories were even more ridiculous didn't paint a reassuring picture.

She stopped at a suitable distance and bowed, her team doing the same. A respectful bow of one individual to another, not that of a slave to its master.

[Godslayer – lvl ???]

Malise's mind raced, her breathing picking up slightly before she managed to calm herself. She had thought herself prepared, but what she saw was not part of her predictions.

"I greet you, Godslayer," she said, choosing something respectful. While Lilith did not flaunt her wealth, she did flaunt what Malise assumed to be a title of sorts. The three marks were no surprise, impressive still, to see in the flesh. Kyrian was supposed to be in the five hundreds as well, but she had yet to meet the man.

"Nice to meet you all," the woman spoke, her expression suggesting slight annoyance.

She is not pleased with us? Though she was uncaring before. The mention of her title then? Perhaps not something she wishes to bear, but a necessity? A curse?

"You may call me Ilea," she added.

I see.

"Ilea then, it is good to finally meet you. I am Malise, former slave of Seyna," Malise spoke. "And my greetings to you, Headmaster. May I introduce the team?"

Take control of the conversation. Tell her who you are, what you can do. She will be sympathetic to former slaves, and has placed capable people in positions of importance.

"Good evening, Malise. You may," Trian spoke with a slight smile.

He knew what she was doing, the man a noble trained from birth. He would not fail to see it, but it didn't matter. She only had to speak the truth in the most beneficial manner. She didn't feel nervous, knowing at the very least that whatever she said, the godslayer would not kill or abuse them. That far, she trusted her intuition, based on all the information she had gathered.

“I used to manage farms and estates for my former masters in and near Seyna. We were far enough away from the city when the blood ritual reached to the sky with its impossible magic. Many chose to flee in the chaos, an opportunity like none before. As did we,” she said and looked at her allies. She ground her teeth ever so slightly. *Still awe struck by the monster. Have you forgotten everything I told you?*

Malise continued with barely a breath lost, though she knew the two listeners would’ve noticed. “This is Halra. A former slave who used to train those meant to fight in the great gladiator battles of Seyna.”

“So that’s what those arenas were for,” the godslayer murmured.

She was there then, Malise thought. It hardly mattered. If anything it helped.

“She is far more experienced than most warriors you will find, though of course she was not allowed to battle monsters or kill others, for fear that she would grow too strong,” Malise spoke.

“Show me,” Ilea said.

“Now?” the Headmaster asked.

Malise didn’t interrupt. Claims had been made, and the godslayer wanted proof. That was no issue, for her words had been the truth.

“Halra was it? Do you mind fighting me for a few minutes?” Ilea asked.

“No, mistress,” Halra spoke, bowing, as a slave would.

Malise hissed.

“It is not required,” Trian spoke. “You are free to do as you wish.”

“I don’t mind either way,” Ilea said, and by the tone of her voice, Malise gauged that she meant it.

“I will fight,” Halra spoke. “As you are one of those who has provided this opportunity. What is it you wish to see?”

“Use whatever weapons you like, and come at me with the intent to kill,” Ilea said.

“Very well,” Halra spoke, magic flowing out as lines of fire appeared on her skin. “May I have a spear?”

The weapon of choice appeared in Trian’s hand before he threw it over.

“I thank thee, Headmaster,” Halra said as she stepped over to make some space for the battle.

Ilea appeared nearby.

Malise felt no magic from the woman, though there was something about her presence. She knew it would be fatal to attack her, even without the title she had seen. And she could see it in her eyes now. A warrior. Not one driven by fanaticism, insecurity, wealth, or power. No, she was the sort that simply enjoyed battle. *One like Halra*, Malise thought, her face a perfect mask.

“You are a Fire Enhancer,” Ilea remarked.

“I am, Mistress,” Halra replied. “Is my magic not suitable for this bout?”

“No, no. It’s just that I had the same Class once,” Ilea said. “Now come at me, and don’t hold back.”

“I will not,” Halra said and flashed one of her rare smiles. She crouched and rushed forward, closing the distance in mere moments before she thrust her spear straight at her target’s heart. A feint, followed by two side steps and a slash aimed at Ilea’s hand.

To Malise’s surprise, the blade of the spear connected. She realized a moment later that there was no cut however, Halra jumping back as she kept her spear angled forward, assessing her opponent.

Ilea grinned and crouched, moving towards Halra with far greater speed. She dodged two spear thrusts from a Halra that took several steps backwards to keep the distance, slashing wide when she realized Ilea was too fast.

Halra didn’t wait when Ilea stopped advancing, instead closing the distance yet again and striking straight at her throat. This time it was no feint, the lines of fire on her skin flaring up when the metal struck skin.

Ilea reached up as Halra made distance at the movement. She hadn't felt the strike but the sound suggested quite a bit of power behind it. “Not bad,” she spoke. “But what will you do...” Ilea said, blue runes appearing on her skin as the pressure of the hall changed.

Malise activated every enhancing spell she had, holding her breath against the flow of magic that she felt.

“... in the face of overwhelming power?” Ilea finished, dark ashen wings spreading from her back, wisps of blue energies moving. Blue light left a trail where the runes moved.

Halra was already running, towards the exit of the hall.

“Damn. I mean I guess that one makes the most sense,” Ilea said and started laughing, her wings dissolving as the light of the runes waned. She landed on the stone floor with a noticeable impact before raising her hand towards the spear wielder who had just about reached the closed double doors.

Halra vanished and appeared in her initial position, spear in hand and crouched.

“The bout is over,” Ilea said. “Before you run again.”

“There were no restrictions,” Halra spoke. “I deemed it the approach most likely to succeed.”

“You might be right, and you’re certainly experienced. Just missing the required Classes. Are you sure you want to do this? You could succeed with anything. If the Elixir kills you, it would be such a waste,” Ilea said.

Malise could breathe again. Her spells waned just as the power she had felt. She heard genuine concern from the tone of the woman.

“I wish to seek challenge, and I do not strive for mediocrity, now that I am free,” Halra spoke, her words deliberate and spoken with conviction. “If this is how I shall die, then let it be my choice.”

“Very well,” Ilea spoke. “Who is the rest?”

Malise had to catch her breath but she managed. “Balt, a former slave and meant to become a gladiator for the purpose of entertainment. He is young, but his talents are promising, both to the eyes of Halra, and my own.”

“And you would make that choice yourself?” Ilea asked, looking at the man.

Balt glanced to Malise.

“You are free. Speak freely,” Malise confirmed.

He looked to the woman and considered his words. “I have been granted freedom. And I was trained by the best. I shall not be left behind, and I shall wish to be the first, if such is possible.”

“I will be the first,” Malise spoke up, eyes on Trian. If he had wanted to test something on slaves or fanatics, he would’ve done so long ago. Balt may be the only one not to receive the elixir, but if there was a way for him to get it, she would fight for him. “He will be last, and if possible, only if the others have survived.”

The Headmaster gave her a slight nod.

“And you are?” Ilea asked.

“Veyra, Lady Ilea,” the woman said and bowed. She considered and glanced to Malise.

The truth only. “She was to be a healer of the Order of Truth, until she learned of their deep running corruption. We met in the northern regions of Lys, months after our escape. Veyra had chosen to help former slaves and refugees from the war. She is to me like a sister.”

And sisters can be such a pain.

“We don’t know what the Elixir will do. Hopefully it will provide the same change that I went through, and provide you with Classes related to Arcane healing. If it works, you’ll be in high demand among the Sentinels, and we’ll be able to perhaps use the Elixir on others. The original elixir had a high rate of fatality. The Medic Classes are powerful as they are, perhaps even more powerful than mine. Would you still make that choice?” Ilea asked.

“I would. And I shall uphold the decrees of the Medic Sentinels,” Malise spoke. *Decrees so simple anyone with the right mind would find it easy to uphold.* Compared to what any other Order demanded, they would practically be free to do as they saw fit. Malise did not miss the obvious existence of unwritten debt, but she would not dismiss it. She never forgot those who helped her, or those who wronged her.

“As will I,” Halra spoke. “And while I may not reach your heights, I shall become what I am meant to be.”

“Your offer is quite ridiculous. Any sane woman would take you up on it,” Veyra said. “You two don’t have to pretend like it’s a sacrifice.”

Malise was careful to watch Ilea as her companion spoke her arrogant words. *Amused.* She was not sure if that meant there was a catch or if the godslayer was in a position of such privilege, she did not understand the value of this gift. Either was possible with what she knew.

“I will accept this gift and the risk that comes with it, should you allow it,” Balt spoke.

“Suppose that’s as much as we can ask,” Ilea said and looked to the Headmaster.

“Sure,” he spoke after a few seconds.

Telepathy, as expected.

“We can go ahead until the others are ready,” the godslayer spoke. “Have you met the Meadow?”

“We did not have the honor quite yet,” Malise said. Visiting a four mark being that saw all was not on her list of priorities. Let alone when it controlled space itself.

“Then follow me,” Ilea said with a smile on her face.

Malise watched the woman take a few steps and vanish. She raised her brows, glancing at Trian.

“There’s a gate here,” he said, pointing where Ilea had walked.

Malise took in a deep breath and followed, gesturing for her team to do the same. One moment she was in the training hall of the Medic Sentinel Corps, the next, she stood within a dome like barrier.

Trapped, something shouted within her, but the voice was suppressed, smothered. Something long gone. Something she had long defeated. Malise had not been a slave for a long time, no matter what her masters had thought. And now she was truly free, merely in the presence of powerful beings.

Powerful beings that were willing to give her a slew of opportunities, and she would not waste it.

“*So you are the ones. Greetings, future Sentinels, to my domain,*” a voice resounded in her mind.

She bowed once more. “*Endless Meadow of the Accords. It is an honor to make your acquaintance,*” she sent back through the connection that she felt within her mind.

“*I dare say your journey has been long, and I will watch with interest, to where it leads, Malise,*” the being spoke once more.

Malise felt herself wanting to gulp, but she stopped the urge. She would respect its power. Nothing more and nothing less. Her breathing slowed.

The other faculty arrived, one by one. Sidney, Orthan, Lyza, a large silver machine that resembled the Centurions, and a man Malise did not know.

“Elder Lucas,” Trian introduced. “He aided in the modification of the Elixir.”

An elder of the Shadow’s Hand.

Malise bowed to him before she turned to Trian. “We shall not waste the time of the esteemed beings present. If you would accept, I am ready.”

Lyza walked over and opened her palm. “Try not to die,” she said with an exaggerated smile, handing over the slightly glowing blue root.

[Bluemoon root]

No indication as to the quality or what it will do.

She saw the entire faculty of the Medic Sentinels look at her with differing expressions, all of them waiting. This time she gulped.

May fortune be with me, she thought and ate the root.

“That was quick,” Lyza spoke.

“Not a surprise,” Trian said with a smile.

Malise focused on her breathing, closing her eyes when she felt the first pulse flow through her.

Pain.

Searing pain.

As if her very veins were ripped out of her body. She tried to endure it, but failed. Screaming, she fell to her knees, growing wooden roots catching her in a gentle embrace. She screamed and screamed. The world faded to black.

Malise woke and shivered, gritting her teeth when the pain resumed. *Please*, she begged in her mind, a part of her glad she had not spoken aloud, the rest of her screaming yet again.

It did not stop, her consciousness fading time and time again.

When it finally stopped, Malise did not know how long she had been gone. She remained in the wooden embrace, no indication of blood or puke on the ground before her.

The faculty remained, close now and all around. She looked out and found the face of Halra, a smile on the woman's face. *I survived*, she thought, triumphant.

"Welcome back, Malise," a voice resounded in her mind.

"Did it work?" Ilea asked. "She doesn't feel that different."

"Any messages?" the Headmaster asked.

Malise tried to focus, then nodded weakly.

'ding' The Bluemoon Root has changed your body permanently.

You grow more resilient +10 Vitality

The flow of your mana was changed +10 Intelligence +10 Wisdom

You recharge mana at a faster pace +100% mana recovery rate.

She read the words out loud.

"Yeah, I think that's close to the one that I got back then," Ilea said.

"More importantly, her body was changed to accept the arcane on a fundamental level. A lot of paths just opened up to you, Sentinel Malise. Congratulations," the Meadow spoke.

Malise took in a deep breath and for the first time in a while, she allowed herself a genuine smile. Perhaps these people really were that stupid, and there was no catch at all.

"The elixir has shown an efficient change. We should observe the others, but I believe it to be safe for usage," the Meadow sent.

“That’s great news,” Ilea answered. *“So now we’re going to get arcane healing classes?”*

“With this elixir there are a lot of possibilities. Not just for healing,” the Meadow spoke. *“However the path is merely different. It is not an inherent advantage compared to other elixirs, though if they unlock the mental healing aspect, it should be a major benefit to the Sentinels as a whole. It will be interesting to see in what other ways the arcane may manifest.”*

Trian took in a deep breath. “Three more left,” he spoke with a serious tone.

“Right, who’s next?” Ilea asked.

The other three followed. Several hours of agony as their bodies were changed by the elixir, neither Ilea nor the Meadow interfering with the process.

While invasive, there didn’t seem to be any danger to their lives, the root doing the same that the Bluemoon Grass had done without the supposed danger.

“The four first Sentinels with the potential for arcane healing,” Ilea said.

“You better get to training, I want to know if it worked,” Lyza spoke, her arms crossed.

Ilea smiled. “Let’s get back then and have a celebratory feast.”

“You always have feasts,” Trian said.

“Yes, they’re wonderful after all,” she said and chose a mark that resided in Ravenhall. *Perfect.*

“Keyla, I’m coming with a group of people for a feast. Are you available?”

She waited for a moment.

“Give me. Ten minutes. I’m doing something,” the answer came.

Did she sound more raspy than usual? Ilea raised her brows. “We’re leaving in fifteen minutes. How are you four doing?”

She looked at the future Sentinels, changed by nearly the same elixir she had found so long ago in the Azarinth temple. *“Did we just revive something terrible, or something great?”* she sent to the Meadow.

The recruits looked well enough. Exhausted to be sure, but that was no surprise.

“Let it be what they make of it,” the Meadow sent. *“As you did.”*