

Chapter 917 “Dating”

Ilea narrowed her eyes at the glowing manifestation of light magic. Felicia had a day off and now this ancient piece of elven history couldn't even be bothered showing her real form. She crossed her arms, unimpressed with the creature, in no way as interesting as the Oracle she had met in the Still Valley.

“You couldn't even show up in your real form?” she sent, including everyone else in her telepathy.

The white eyes of light blinked. *“Thou speak bluntly, Bearer. The beings next to your form may be blinded and perhaps burnt away should we manifest in a form beyond this. Though if thine wish is to see us, we shall grant thine request.”*

She could see Elfie and Myr Iva shift slightly. *“Don't. I won't show my flames here either,”* Ilea sent. *“I know we're supposed to mend relations, but I have little interest in talking to you after everything that happened. If you could just communicate with the Sentinel of Akelion here, I would greatly appreciate that.”*

“Thou art Monarch. We shall speak with the Sentinel of Akelion, if that is thine wish.”

“That is what I wish,” Ilea said. *“And while we're at it, you could speak with any representative of the Accords, really.”*

The Oracle gave her a slight nod, her eyes glowing bright.

Ilea looked to Aki.

The Pursuer stepped forward. *“How would you wish to be addressed as?”*

“However thou please, machine god of the Taleen,” the Oracle replied.

“Oracles of Verleyyna. Who do you consider your enemies?” Aki sent.

Ilea wondered at the questioning, but she supposed her friend would want to protect the Accords and find out as much as he could about Verleyyna and the Domains while he had the opportunity to talk to the ancient being.

“Only those who alter the balance of magic are to be considered what thine kind may think as enemy.”

“Then you do not consider the Accords, the city of Riverwatch, humans in general, or any of the beings present here as your enemy?” Aki spoke.

“It is as you speak.”

“May we ask why you have helped in the attack on our cities and peoples?”

“Such was wished by the Monarch, returned now, to his final rest. Ner cerithial.”

“Ner cerithial,” Aki spoke. *“Which then we can presume that the new Monarch may offer her wishes in turn?”*

The Oracle bowed.

“What is the extent of such wishes?” Aki asked.

“Such is not for thou to know, representative,” the Oracle spoke.

“What is the extent of such wishes?” Ilea asked.

“Such depends on thine wish, Monarch.”

Ilea sighed. She talked to Aki. *“Depends on the wish. What should I check?”*

“There are a few things I’d like to know,” Aki answered.

“Let’s get on with it then,” Ilea sent to him. “Wait. Before that,” she said and addressed the Oracle again. “May I wish that the Sentinel of Akelion may ask these kinds of questions?”

“Thou art Monarch. The machine is not.”

So much for that thought.

The next hour, she spent playing middle woman between the Accords and the Oracle of Verleyyna. Perhaps Oracles, though they were incredibly vague as to their own nature, the connection to the formerly flying city, and as to how many of them there were. Ilea wouldn’t have been surprised to learn if there was some sort of Hive mind fuckery going on, similar as with the Fae. They knew a lot, though she found their answers to be ignorant at times as well. As if talking to, well, an ancient elven being that felt as much magic as it was a person.

As the new Monarch of Verleyyna, she could now essentially command the direction in which the city flew, where it stayed, and in some limited capacity, what it attacked. Defense would be chosen by the Oracles themselves, and they still apparently decided on how much force they would use in their attacks, but they would respect the wishes of her as Monarch. One thing she noted was that they gave very little shits about her being a human, addressing her as Bearer or Monarch, the former seemingly something even more highly regarded than the latter.

“We would like to know about the status of those considered cursed. Elves who have entered what you call Nar el Ceroth, a place of creation, or dungeon as we say,” Ilea said.

“We provide guidance. Our children choose to fight and impose their might and rules, as they should. We do not wish for our children to enter places of creation, to keep them from meddling with the ways of mana, but we accept that understanding is not always instilled with shared knowledge alone, but requires experience. Rules and orchestration has worked to keep young children from temptation and the meddling with magic, but these were ways chosen by Monarchs. If such is not your wish, we offer guidance for you to come to understanding, and find wisdom in our words.”

“So you just stood back while all of this happened?” Ilea asked. She felt reminded of her first conversation with an Oracle and waved it off. “Don’t answer that. I don’t care. Feel free to talk to Feyrair or the Sentinel of Akelion about this wisdom, they may be interested.”

They don’t care about how the Monarchs achieved what they call guidance. They just care about the results, ignoring all the suffering on the way.

Maybe if there is some end of the world danger connected to going into dungeons, Aki and the Meadow could learn of it from the Oracles.

Ilea found herself hoping that there wasn’t a good or simple reason. The elves she had met just thought these rules, imposed by the Oracles. If there was a simple reason, she would be pissed if that wasn’t shared with any of the elves. The Cerithil Hunters would’ve perhaps not been seen as cursed, but simply choosing one evil over the other, for one specific goal.

Further questions only led to more talk on the balance of magic, and their wish for beings not to meddle with that.

Most of it went over her head, but the Oracles spoke to everyone present.

Erik glanced at her and smiled. *“I can tell you are annoyed, but consider that technologies like the Extraction at least support some form of conservatism when it comes to magic and the research of it.”*

“Knowing the Olym Arcena had come to be, it makes little sense for one single people to restrict its own progress in the hopes of others doing the same,” Aki retorted.

“It does not, if ones goal is to survive and prevail. A decidedly human concept. Not all beings share this philosophy,” Erik sent.

“I have too little information to form a coherent opinion, however as of now it seems it is fear of a disruption of balance rather than a more specific event that has led to their decision,” Aki sent.

“Change may be something they consider unnatural on a fundamental level. I do not agree with their philosophy, but I find it enlightening consider my past considerations in regards to Elven kind. Thank you all for allowing my presence,” Erik said.

“We will talk and document, though restriction would put our peoples at a disadvantage and in danger, which cannot happen. However as to future relations with the Domains and more specifically the Oracles guiding them, it will be invaluable to understand their way of thinking,” Aki sent.

Ilea agreed. They were here. Right now. Shit like the Extraction was also here, and they would use everything they could to defend against it. Including her own powers that even the Meadow didn't really understand yet.

The Oracles had their own questions when Aki was done relaying his own to Ilea. She found it funny that the only thing the Oracles were really interested in were the Primordial Flame and the Fires of Creation, the latter wielded by Myr Iva. Considering their rules against going into dungeons and the balance of magic, they didn't exactly restrict themselves in trying to learn about the different and powerful spells.

Ilea of course didn't share anything. Not that she really had anything to share other than showing them the fires again, but they had seen plenty of it already.

Aki's questions as to the history of Verleyyna or the nature of the Oracles were ignored just as much, but Aki assumed that perhaps they may be interested in a trade of information in the future, if anything important enough came up where the Oracles and their knowledge could be of help.

Ilea stretched when she thought the meeting done, but Aki brought up a last question that made her mood sour instantly, before she remembered she had a copy who could wield her cosmic healing.

She addressed the manifestation of the Oracle. *“Verleyyna is grounded. We believe it would be beneficial to everyone if it was flying again, and more than some distance away from this territory. Would you be against repairs conducted by the Accords?”*

“Many of the enchantments run deep and are damaged beyond repair. We do not believe such possible, though would not oppose efforts to remedy the state of our city.”

“Feel free to try,” Ilea sent to Aki and summoned her copies. All but one, she sent North and to the Meadow.

“More data for your healing. It will be welcome. Thanks, Ilea,” Aki sent.

“May I watch as well?” Erik asked, glancing between the two of them.

“Sure,” Ilea said.

The Pursuer’s eyes glowed. *“It is her magic. And she agrees.”*

Ilea yawned. *“I’ll be out of here in that case. Happy to send a replacement healer in an hour.”*

“I’ll have one of your marks contact you,” Aki sent.

“Enjoy your stay in Verleyrna,” she sent to the others and waved.

Ilea gave the manifested Oracle a last look before she flew out of the city, focusing on the mark on Felicia before she activated Teleportation.

She appeared in a meadow surrounded by trees, the distant and towering walls of Virilya letting her know where she was.

Felicia lay on the grass, in the shade of an old oak, wearing her best set of enchanted half plate armor, helmet set aside with her hair open. She twirled a single white flower between her fingers and turned slightly to look at Ilea. A smile blossomed on her face. “How was it?”

Ilea sighed and fell down onto the grass next to her, space magic activating to slow and cushion her fall, and kept active to prevent her from sinking down into the earth. She summoned a bottle of ale and opened it. “Annoying. Same as the other one really. They just feel, disconnected. From everything.”

“Ancient guardians, I suppose. Makes enough sense to me, really,” Felicia said. “Can I have a bottle too?”

“Sure, sorry,” Ilea said and handed hers to Felicia, summoning another.

“Kiss me.”

Ilea blinked at that and looked at the yellow eyes staring at her. She smiled and leaned closer, kissing the woman. “Sorry for being late.”

“For good reason, but I appreciate the apology,” Felicia said and drank from the bottle.

“How was your day?” Ilea asked.

“Fine,” Felicia said and touched her lip. She looked up at the clouds and sprawled out on the grass. “The court is still going on about Verleyrna and an elven domain. I feel bad for Syrithis. I saw her hands twitching earlier. Malkorn told me she’s been more quiet than usual.”

“Yeah. I mean I can imagine her being a little more shocked by the news than anybody else,” Ilea said. “I hope she’s been in touch with Isalthar.”

“I’m sure she has, otherwise she’d have requested to be stationed in Riverwatch already. Other than the court being as busy as it is, things are alright. Edwin stopped by as well. This time he didn’t

even rant about Ravenhall or the Academy. Instead he asked me for advice here and there. Seems like he's starting to consider some of the opportunities he has, though I hope he won't be paralyzed by choice."

"He'll get there, I'm sure," Ilea said.

"I know. Just hard to stop myself from pushing one way or the other. He's so fucking stubborn," she said and growled, the air whispering with her voice.

"How is Aliana?"

"She seems happy with Kyrian, though she's expressed some worry, about his intake of food. Thinks he's not eating enough."

Ilea raised her brows.

"It's not even a question of health. She's just not sure if she wants to be with someone who doesn't eat an entire animal every day."

"Right," Ilea said and paused. "And you? Not too stressed?"

"It has been stressful. Another reason why I want to do this," Felicia said with a grin.

"You're really sure? You know you don't have to get stronger just because you're with me," Ilea said.

Felicia grabbed Ilea's cheek. "I'll do it anyway. Besides, it's been far too long since I've fought anything that could kill me. And after being in bed with you, there's hardly anything more dangerous for me out there."

Ilea drank from her ale, keeping eye contact with the woman.

"Don't look at me like that. Or we'll be stuck here for most of the afternoon. We're late already," Felicia said and jumped up. She put on her helmet and stretched. "Aki knows his dungeons. He checked to make sure there's nothing above level four hundred."

"I'll stay close anyway," Ilea said.

"Might get injured on purpose if you don't let me do my thing," Felicia said and smiled. "So that my brave knight can save me."

Ilea rolled her eyes and smiled. "I at least want to see you fight."

"You're allowed to watch," Felicia said with a grin, then raised her arm. "Let's go then. To the gates."

Ilea and Felicia appeared on a remote Accords teleportation gate and soon followed the delegated Centurion.

"The current population is medium. I ask you to return after you've killed at most thirty nine of the Cave Gellens," the machine spoke.

"I hope I can kill five of them today," Felicia said.

They had read up on the creatures. Six legged insectoids with thick armor and powerful acid attacks. Felicia was far below their usual level range and would not be advised to engage them at all, even with Aki's provided scouting knowledge. Let alone by herself.

However her Berserker abilities coupled with Ilea's presence made the battle at least possible. All of them knew that she would likely get hurt, but Felicia had insisted on it. And she wanted to do more than just this. The Veyran Caves in the eastern parts of the Naraza mountain range were just the first dungeon on her list.

"I'll be mad if you die," Ilea said when they entered the cave.

Felicia gave her a kiss and grinned, her magic flaring to life as she went on ahead. "I'll do my best to make it exciting."

Ilea watched her go. It was dark, but of course she could see, and she knew that Felicia had ways to perceive her surroundings well enough as well. Including the torch she carried.

"You don't think she's really in danger, do you?" Ilea asked her green eyed companion as she counted down in her head.

"She is in great danger," Aki said. "As it should be."

"You're not great at this."

"She trusts you enough to do this. You should trust her as well," Aki said.

Ilea took in a deep breath. She finished her counting and followed at a slow pace. "I know. I'm trying."

They walked for some time until she heard sounds of battle from ahead.

A quick run brought them to a drop down into a broad cavern. The torch had been dropped, creating a small area of illuminated stone.

Felicia flew and teleported between three of the massive six legged creatures, their front arms bladed, dark blue eyes taking in their prey as they tried to circle her, acid spraying out as Felicia responded with gusts of wind to disperse the liquid, her wind blades crashing against the thick armor of the creatures.

Ilea watched the ongoing battle. She found herself feeling tense, even though she knew she could intervene at any time. *Do I feel guilty because I'm thinking she's doing this for me? Or am I just scared?*

Felicia had suggested the activity some time ago. She had been reminiscing about their exploration and fighting in the Iztacalum dungeon. Both their collaboration but also just the excitement of fighting dangerous creatures. Her recent work didn't exactly provide a lot of opportunities such as this.

"Can you distract me?" Ilea said in a quiet voice.

The centurion glanced over to her. "I can try." The machine was quiet for a moment before it spoke up. "I got news earlier this week that the Mind Weavers brought back from Octavia have found the likely location of the Oracle controlling much of the Cursed Marshes. A far reaching cavern that is defending itself far more actively than the rest of the swamp."

"They went in already?" Ilea asked. She watched Felicia narrowly dodging a blade attack.

“They sent in some of the Wisp Ravens to scout but they didn’t return. One of the Crocodiles they control came back with severe injuries.”

“They have crocodiles already?”

“They’re clearing out most of the marshes at this point. There hasn’t been a Dread Beast sighting in several weeks and the monster groups they control is growing. Valuable data for me as well as to the capabilities of Mind Weavers, and their mind magic in turn. Some specialized mages have shown interest in studying with them. You maintain your opinion on the Oracle?”

Ilea shrugged. “I can go an kill it if you need me to, but it’s a high level creature that could provide good training, let alone a lot more of a challenge for someone else than it would be for me at this point. It’s stationary like we assumed?”

“There has been no movement,” Aki confirmed. “I will let you know if anything changes on that front, but no, we don’t need you to take care of it.” He paused for a moment when Felicia’s laughter echoed through the cavern. She jumped away, hands clad in vibrating air.

One of the Cave Gellens collapsed, its head falling off with a clean cut going all the way through its neck.

Ilea smiled. *That’s one down.*