

## Chapter 862 Whispers

Ilea couldn't tell the passing of time. Looking inward, she could see the fractured remains of her soul, held together by bits and pieces of her white fires.

Silver threads around her arm began to pull, sliding her decaying form into a nearby ravine. A few threads lashed out when demon spawn approached her, chunks of flesh falling to the ground.

Ilea gasped in ragged breaths, flashes of the Leviathan eye coming to her mind, followed by the Fae she had seen in the desert, all of it overwhelming. She felt the ocean, heard the waves. She shivered and activated her perception of pain, the third tier of her tolerance letting her focus, the sensation clearing her mind of the intrusive curse lain into her. She could feel it now as the silver threads carefully moved her down into the ravine, finding a spot where she could be hidden from the dangers lurking above.

This curse would kill her.

She could not heal, even her third tier failing her.

*It's in my bones. My flesh. My blood. My very magic.*

Ilea opened her mouth, using all of her focus, she formed a single ashen limb. And hacked down into her shoulder. Again, she cut, tearing flesh and muscle, until finally the limb came lose. She took in a ragged breath, feeling herself slowly fade as the curse took hold of her body. Her other shoulder, then her legs.

She was bleeding out, but blood didn't matter, not to her.

Pushing her healing while focusing on her arms and legs, she could see bits and pieces of flesh reforming. For every inch she regained, she ripped out another piece.

The curse was still spreading, taking what she had reformed, but she would not lose. Her fires burned whenever she could form them, pushing back against the spell still lingering within her. Each piece she ripped out, each piece she reformed. New flesh, lush with her magic, untainted, and uncursed. Her limbs and core clear, she worked her way up to her chest and then her neck.

Ilea took in a deep breath, four ashen limbs now sitting right below her chin. *Get out.*

The limbs cut down, getting stuck half way before she willed them up again. A second strike ripped off her head, her limbs sending the thing rolling away. Ilea saw the world spinning as her perception split. Her third tier healing came to life as she focused on her chest and core as much as she could. A feeling at this point, but it felt intuitive, as if she could perceive her head and her body. The choice was obvious.

Her eyes opened a moment later. New eyes. Untouched by the curse. She gasped and took in a deep breath before she coughed. Her body was new, ash and fire spreading out to burn away the bits and pieces of flesh nearby. She saw her own head, most of the skin gone, eye sockets filled with blood red pus.

Ilea sat up and gathered heat, Embered Heart incinerating what had remained of her head. She used the spell four more times until even the skull was gone, no longer reinforced by her body enhancements.

She shivered.

She felt weak.

Her regeneration wasn't the same still, but she knew the curse was gone, she could feel it, as if its presence was removed, and still she paid a price.

Taking in a deep breath, she glanced over at the silver threads keeping the hammer floating between the walls of the ravine. "*Thank you,*" she sent and spread her ash. "*Were you cursed as well?*"

She didn't receive a response, but quickly singed the hammer with her flames. "*Just to be sure.*" She didn't know if a divine object could be cursed after its creation, or if it could feel pain, but she wanted to make sure to cleanse it as best she could before she touched it again.

Ready to cut off her arm, she held out her palm. Ilea sighed in relief when she felt nothing of the curse from the silver metal. Just the usual, far more normal curse.

The thought made her giggle, the sound turning into laughter as she collapsed on a ledge down in the ravine, somewhere in Kohr.

She focused after a minute. *I feel like shit.*

Her mantle formed but slower than usually, her wings too. Flying felt exhaustive. She still flew up and covered some distance through Kohr before she checked herself again. Her soul was shattered, that she knew, but her third tier soul magic resistance promised that it could not be destroyed.

*"Be prepared for an examination of curse and soul magic. Very high danger. I need Aki there as well,"* she sent to the Meadow.

A few seconds passed.

*"Enter with your gate location, if you can. A perimeter is set up,"* the answer came.

Ilea took in a deep breath and opened her gate. She stepped through and found Owl with several Executioners waiting for her. Barriers formed immediately to separate her from the others.

*"You look horrible, more so than usual,"* the Meadow sent.

"Better than dead," she answered with a slight smile.

"Your soul is fractured. It will take time to heal," Owl said quickly.

Kyrian appeared nearby and rushed towards her. Curse magic glowed before he shook his head. "Nothing beside the hammer."

"Right," Ilea said and stored the thing, waiting for another examination. Nothing else came up.

*"May I see your blood?"* the Meadow asked.

Ilea cut open her arm and let some of it drip down, the drops floating in mid air.

*"This is... quite peculiar. No curse remains, and yet you are so very weakened. What happened?"*

"I found the Sanguerrihn. Deep below Paarrah. Aki, I suggest you disconnect that platform. If he hasn't destroyed all of your machines yet," she said.

"Nothing has come in the ancient town," the Executioner said. "I will change my patterns within the city. We will know if he shows up."

"I don't think he's an exceptional space mage, otherwise I might not have escaped," Ilea said.

"Isn't that the guy who made your hammer?" Kyrian asked.

"The legendary smith, yes," Aki spoke. "And the one responsible for the downfall of Paarah."

"He said he was the first enchanter," Ilea added, sitting down on the wooden chair provided by the Meadow. "Thanks."

"If that is the case," the Executioner spoke and paused for a few seconds. "Savien Velmark, First Enchanter of Paarah. Thought deceased, but the records are not quite clear. Intrigue. One of the letters recovered mentions the death of his wife Mira Velmark, and his son Jasha. Regret is expressed, as is necessity. I suspect they were killed."

"Not a great move, as it turns out," Ilea said, touching her brow.

*"There are stories of his passing and his relics from all manner of civilizations. What are the chances of retaliation?"* the Meadow asked.

"His motive was revenge, chaos, or grief, perhaps a magical goal with the destruction of Paarah. However I suspect the chance of the latter is low. Chaos, death, and curses follow where he himself or his artifacts go, but he is seldom shown to do anything directly," Aki explained.

"Maybe when that happens, everyone just dies," Kyrian suggested.

"Can you tell us what happened exactly?" Aki asked.

Ilea took in a deep breath and recounted everything, from her journey down into the depths below Paarah, fighting the Cursed, the forge, and the Sanguerrihn.

"The curse would have been around for some time, considering the variety and number of creatures you have found. It does not seem like he placed them there for security, not with the lack of defensive enchantments, and the casual demeanor you have described. If anything, he keeps the curse active to prevent anything from bothering him," the Executioner spoke.

*"Going by the way he shared his name, and by what he said right before, I think he meant to bestow an honor upon you,"* the Meadow said.

"And then he tries to kill me right after?" Ilea asked.

*"Precisely. He is lost. Cursed perhaps, in one way or more,"* the Meadow said.

"And we cannot predict his movements, nor his abilities, or the artifacts he possesses," Aki spoke. "I will try to find a way to measure the curse at the edge of his domain. You are sure he is the source?"

"It came from him, but it could be an item in his possession, I don't know," Ilea said.

She sighed.

*Trying to prepare for one ancient evil and stumbling onto another one.*

"Guess I'll have to fight him again," she said.

"If he's still creating artifacts, you would do the world a service," Aki said.

*"Let us hope he is not working towards a greater goal,"* the Meadow said.

*I hope I didn't just give him one.*

*He did seem to enjoy himself in the end. If only just a little.*

She thought about the way he spoke, the way he smiled ever so slightly, only for it all to go in the next instant.

She huffed with a smile.

“I think he already fulfilled his goal, a long time ago,” she murmured. “The curse lain upon this world.”

“*We will study what we can, to understand him,*” the Meadow said.

“And I will prepare to face him again. It’s good training either way,” she said.

“No,” Kyrian retorted.

“What do you mean, no?”

“You need time to recover before you continue.”

Ilea glared at him.

He raised his brows. “You’re smarter than that.”

“I’m a Sanguerrihn certified dimwit, and he nearly killed me with one spell,” she said.

“*Did you gain a core skill point for surviving it? The name could reveal something about the First Enchanter,*” the Meadow sent.

Ilea took in a deep breath. She *did* feel tired, and absolutely exhausted. “*I can check.*”

***‘ding’ ‘Ashen Limbs reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 8’***

***‘ding’ ‘Azarinth Barrier [Mythic] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 29’***

***‘ding’ ‘Bulwark of Ash reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 15’***

***‘ding’ ‘Bulwark of Ash reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 16’***

***‘ding’ ‘Identify reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 11’***

***‘ding’ ‘Meditation reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 30’***

***‘ding’ ‘Soul Perception reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 11’***

***‘ding’ ‘Soul Perception reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 12’***

***‘ding’ ‘Spear of Ash reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 9’***

*Meditation at thirty. At least something useful gained from the fight, she thought with a slight grin.*

***‘ding’ ‘Blast Resistance reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 27’***

***‘ding’ ‘Blast Resistance reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 28’***

***‘ding’ ‘Curse Resistance reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 21’***

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***‘ding’ ‘Curse Resistance reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 26’***

***‘ding’ ‘Fear Resistance reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 10’***

***‘ding’ ‘Mental Resistance reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 28’***

***‘ding’ ‘Pain Tolerance reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 5’***

***‘ding’ ‘Silver Magic Resistance reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 6’***

***‘ding’ ‘Silver Magic Resistance reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 7’***

...

***‘ding’ ‘Silver Magic Resistance reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 20’***

***‘ding’ ‘Soul Magic Resistance reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 11’***

***‘ding’ ‘One third tier General skill point awarded’***

*That’s one way to level my curse and silver resistances. She sighed. At least for the next time she fought him, she’d be a tiny bit more prepared. She immediately leveled her Silver Magic Resistance to the third tier.*

***‘ding’ ‘Silver Magic Resistance reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 1’***

***Silver Magic Resistance – 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 1***

***A rare magic to be sure and just as deadly. Not quite corrosion or poison, silver magic can be devious, its effects complex. You have survived and are one of few who have been exposed and lived.***

***2nd stage: Your body has been exposed to extensive damage wrought by silver magic. Both your skin and any element you control becomes more resistant to the effects of this school of magic.***

***3rd stage: Your magic and body have adapted to the effects of silver magic, making it far more difficult for silver to invade and erode your magical constructs and your flesh. Any magical effects you create will be more effective at shedding away silver clinging to your form.***

*And another tool. Ilea wondered if the dwarf had gotten any major upgrades to his resistances based on her attacks. Not like he took a lot of hits. She found the thought more annoying than helpful.*

***‘ding’ ‘You have found the Sanguerrihn – One Core skill point awarded’***

***‘ding’ ‘You have destroyed the Embodiment of Silver – One Core skill point awarded’***

***‘ding’ ‘You have seen the Primordial Curse – One Core skill point awarded’***

***‘ding’ ‘You have survived the Primordial Curse – One Core skill point awarded’***

*“It’s called the Primordial Curse apparently. Just seeing the spell gave me a core point, and surviving it another one,” she said.*

*“I’ve not heard anything about that,” Kyrian said.*

“Neither have I,” spoke Owl.

“There are a few records that mention the name,” the Executioner spoke. “Researchers, nobles, fanatics, seeking a curse magic Class, or a spell, with similar names, if I’m not particular when it comes to translations. The fate of most is unknown, but of those I can find, they went mad in one way or another, attacked their settlements, or were found dead.”

“That could be any curse,” Kyrian said. “Or any magic that is difficult to control.”

“There are a few correlations between three records,” Aki spoke. “Eye sockets filled with red pus, skin entirely decayed.”

“I can attest to that,” Ilea said. “But I don’t know if you should go and study whatever this is. It wasn’t just a spell. There was something there. A presence of sorts.”

“*Perhaps we could ask the Fae, your Class bears the name of Primordial. I do not know of this curse,*” the Meadow spoke.

Ilea nodded and checked her available titles, finding a new one in the list.

**- *The Untainted [You may heal what cannot be healed. You may perceive what cannot be perceived]***

She relayed the information to the others. “Does that mean I can heal the curse next time I’m hit by it?”

“Your third tier resistance, does it not allow you to understand some basic ideas of a curse?” Aki asked.

“Right, yeah,” Ilea said. “I’ll try an heal the damage to my body first,” she said and switched her title to The Untainted. Flooding herself with healing, Ilea didn’t feel a change.

“Extensive damage to the soul can sometimes manifest in physical ways,” Owl said.

Ilea sank into her chair. *I’ll have to actually ride this one out. If this takes longer than a few days I’ll be pissed.*

Kyrian chuckled to himself.

“What’s so funny?” Ilea asked.

“You, for once not being able to shrug off an injury,” Kyrian said in a dry tone.

“I nearly died,” Ilea said.

“You always do that,” he retorted.

She rolled her eyes and tried to use the third tier of her curse resistance to analyze the curse.

Barriers sprung up and magic formed around both Owl and Kyrian.

“What’s g-” Ilea asked when she heard the whispers, immediately stopping whatever she was doing.

“What was that?” Kyrian asked, covered entirely in his heavy armor, curse magic emanating from him.

“I tried to analyze it,” Ilea said.

“That’s not supposed to happen,” Aki said.

*“Perhaps it is best you do not further pursue the study of that curse,”* the Meadow sent.

*“Don’t have to tell me twice,”* Ilea said, taking in a deep breath. *What the fuck, Savien?*

*And now I can’t change my title back for a week.*

*Well. Might not be the worst idea to keep the new one equipped anyway. If the Sanguerrihn shows up somewhere.*

The thought made her consider the forces of the Accords. Could they stop the dwarf if he went all out? *Just one four mark. Equipped with a bunch of items.*

She didn’t doubt that the Meadow, Aki, herself, Owl, and a few high level Mava could take the dwarf together, but that was a best case scenario. She hoped her assumptions about his teleportation abilities were accurate. *I’d probably be more difficult to deal with for an organization like the Accords.*

*Me or an Ascended with space magic, going as far as realm travel.*

Looking to the side, Ilea saw the expanded map of Aki’s search. Many of the teams she had seen earlier were gone now, likely already implementing whatever they had planned here into the cities and settlements of the Accords.

*“Guess I’ll just wait until this passes. You can’t do anything either, Meadow?”* Ilea asked.

*“The soul is outside of my domain. Apologies, friend, for I am finite,”* the being spoke.

*“Any news on the Architect?”* she said instead.

*“I’ll get back to the Headquarters. Glad you survived, Ilea,”* Kyrian said.

*“Sure. Thanks for checking in, I appreciate it,”* she answered and smiled.

*“Nothing new, I’m afraid,”* Aki said. *“Our rudimentary defense and response plans are put into place, but it will take weeks and months to expand them, let alone teaching the various populations.”*

*“Seals not cracked yet?”* she asked the Meadow.

*“Not yet. You have not been gone for very long.”*

*“I know. I’m just annoyed I couldn’t fight Savien for longer,”* she sent.

*“On first name basis already?”* the Meadow asked.

*“You can just tell he’ll be super fucking annoyed if I call him that,”* she answered.

*“Which might lead to retaliation,”* the Meadow said.

*“I will consider the risk,”* she said.

*“And you will ignore it.”*

*“That is your assumption,”* Ilea said and stretched her arms.

*“It is,”* the being spoke.

*“Any tips on soul healing?”* Ilea asked the Greater Lich.

*“Patience, with yourself,”* Owl spoke, a purple smile on her ethereal lips.

*I need a drink.*