

Main Questline Progression

Iris and the others followed the telv woman into a library just down from the grand hall. The room was spacious and adorned with ornate bookcases that reached the ceiling, filled with leather-bound tomes and ancient scrolls. The shelves were illuminated by flickering oil lamps that cast a warm, golden light across the room. Plush chairs and sofas were arranged around a large, mahogany table in the center of the room, and a fireplace crackled merrily in the corner, filling the air with a cozy warmth.

Lady Arden stood there talking with a group of noblewomen. As the group came closer, Iris noticed Lady Imogen present with a scowl on her face. Lady Arden dismissed the group of women and they made their way past Iris and the group.

Lady Imogen, however, walked awfully close to the group, her eyes focused on Iris. She quietly sneered, "It seems House Arden has lowered their standards."

As the woman turned her head away, Iris summoned a bit of electricity to lightly zap her, causing the woman to exclaim in surprise and anger.

The woman rounded on Iris, but the adventurer just put a hand over her mouth innocently.

"Oops," Iris said, concealing her smirk. "I guess you shouldn't get too close."

Lady Imogen scoffed and stomped away, leaving Iris feeling satisfied and victorious, at least until Kaira and Sera both gave her a *look*.

Lady Arden stepped next to the table, her piercing blue eyes surveyed the group with a mix of curiosity and approval. Her long auburn hair was arranged in an intricate updo. Her long emerald green dress boasted a fitted bodice adorned with intricate gold embellishments that trailed downwards, emphasizing the tightly gathered waistline that blossomed into a full, poofy skirt.

"I don't think you've made any friends of House Sinclair, tonight," the woman said with an amused tone.

Iris shrugged. "It is what it is."

The woman chuckled politely. "I am glad you were all able to accept my invitation, and Captain Harken, I didn't expect to see you here."

Kaira gave a hesitant smile. "Iris brought the initial report of the bandit attack and I have been showing her our lovely city. She was kind enough to extend an invitation to me to be her escort."

Lady Arden smirked. "And what an escort it's been. And how are you enjoying the ball?" she asked, turning her attention to the group.

Sera stepped forward, satchel in hand. "It's been quite lovely, Lady Arden. The music is delightful, and the food is divine," she said with a smile.

We didn't try the finger foods yet... Oh, Sera.

Lady Arden nodded. "I'm glad to hear it. And Miss Iris, I must say, that dance you and Captain Harken just had was quite charged," she commented, a glint of amusement in her eyes.

Iris blushed at the mention of the dance, but couldn't help the grin that formed on her face. "It was certainly an experience," she replied with a chuckle.

"When I said I would be interested in seeing your magic, I would never have guessed what it would entail," she said and gestured the group toward the table. "I expect the show will be the talk of tea parties for weeks."

As the group approached the table, Lady Arden then turned to the reason why they were there. "Now, let's discuss the founding of the Adventurer's Guild. I have received word about your little quest this morning, Iris. I must say, after our first discussion, you had my curiosity... but now you have my attention."

"All good, I hope?" Iris asked.

The noblewoman nodded, her expression serious. "It was. Such a situation was exactly how you described it. Someone had a need, and the adventurer solved it. Quick, clean... to an extent," she said and turned her attention to Kaira. "I expect your job will be quite busy tomorrow."

Kaira nodded. "I also expected as much. I have some plans already, but I'll speak with the other captains and come up with something."

The woman nodded. "Please, sit. Miss Timrel, I suspect you are the one with all of the documents."

Sera nodded as she set the satchel down on the table while she sat. She opened the bag, revealing a stack of papers. "Yes, Lady Arden. I have everything we need to get started."

"Excellent," Lady Arden said, taking a seat at the head of the table. "Let us begin."

Sera waited for everyone to sit before she looked down at the first page. "We met with Guildmistress Valentina and gathered some information about the process. After discussion, we are confident in being able to accomplish what is required."

Sera flipped through her notes, her finger tracing down the page as she recounted the meeting with the Merchant Guildmistress. She described the necessary paperwork and funds required, the minimum number of members required, and the process for approval from the Guild Council. As she spoke, Lady Arden listened intently, her eyes fixed on Sera's face, absorbing every detail.

Lady Arden nodded. "Good. Let me say right away, that I am amenable to the idea. Having such a guild in Brightburn would be a large boon, to the city and my House. However, this is the first new guild in ages, it must be done right. Here are my concerns."

Iris glanced around at her companions. Sera had leaned forward, attentive, while Kaira had a thoughtful look on her face. Tanith sat at the other end of the table, calm and collected, his expression neutral.

Lady Arden continued, her gaze fixed on Iris. “First, Miss Stuart, you are a terran and have no ties to Lehelia. You are, to put it bluntly, a nobody in this city. A Guildmaster must be able to interact with nobility, showing that they too have influence and power. Being an outsider makes this all the more difficult.”

Iris squared her shoulders, meeting Lady Arden's gaze. She knew her status as a terran and an outsider in Lehelia would be a hurdle, but she refused to let it discourage her.

Kaira spoke up, her voice measured but firm. “Lady Arden, if I may, Miss Stuart may not have noble ties, but she has already proven herself to be a capable leader and adventurer. And isn't that what matters most in a Guildmaster in such a venture?”

Sera nodded in agreement, while Tanith remained quiet, observing the exchange. Lady Arden considered Kaira's words before giving a small nod. “Valid points, Captain Harken. However, it is not just about leadership and adventuring skills. A Guildmaster must navigate the delicate political landscape of Lehelia, and being an outsider can hinder that. We will need to find a way to mitigate this.”

“So, what can we do?” Iris asked, gesticulating with her hands. “I know the prospect of having a seat on the Guild Council is enticing to you.”

Sera winced, but Lady Arden did not appear surprised at Iris's accusation.

Instead, the woman smiled as she focused on Sera. “I suspect you were the one to find that knowledge. Allow me to confirm your suspicion: you are absolutely correct, but you may have the reasoning wrong.”

Sera tilted her head. “In what way, milady?”

“I want a seat on the guild council because I am *tired* of the Guilds strong-arming their way around my city. They have no check, and it's because the Merchant's Guild only sees in terms of profit. I can point to several ventures and multiple instances where the people of the city suffered because the Guilds prioritized short-term profit rather than what was good for Brightburn,” she said.

Sera perked up. “As part of the Merchant Guild, I and my company would be interested in these examples, Lady Arden. I am sure the House that my company belongs to would appreciate it.”

Lady Arden tilted her head a moment but then held up a hand before retrieving a set of documents. As she spread them out, she started pointing out key situations where the city had suffered but one guild or another had profited, a grain shortage here, a well gone bad there.

The noblewoman explained different cases where the guilds used their influence to ensure they were given preferential treatment and forced predatory terms on citizens or the city.

Iris nodded along. It made sense to want to change that, at least from the noble responsible for the city's standpoint. When Iris asked why the nation hadn't done anything, both Sera and Lady Arden just sighed. Apparently, the guilds *could* strong-arm nations, which led to the noblewoman explaining the war currently happening in the West which had ignited because the guilds had tried interfering with one of the larger empires.

Her gaze lifted as the noblewoman set aside the papers and documents, returning her attention to the task at hand.

"Now, Guildmistress Valentina is retiring soon," Lady Arden explained. "She has been increasingly amenable to changes, but her replacement is not. A benefit of having a guild headquartered here in Brightburn is that it will automatically become the chair of the council. A benefit the Merchant and Banking Guilds pushed through.

"So, yes, I want you to have a seat to my benefit, mainly so the guilds can stay out of my affairs. I don't want to impose on the Adventurer's Guild. You spoke highly of the neutrality of the organization. I'm *counting* on it. The prestige and influence you gain me is also a boon," she said, punctuating her explanation with a deep drink of her wine.

When she finished, she glanced between Sera and Iris and continued, "The two of you surely understand how I must remain cautious of new ventures that could potentially threaten my House's power or status," the lady explained. "There is an established order to things. This may upset that, and I want that, but I *have* to be sure. So, I have a proposal. A quest if you will."

Iris sat up straight, ready for the new challenge. "I'm listening," she said.

Lady Arden leaned forward, clasping her hands on the table. "Ser Meredith has returned, having found nothing about the bandits you mentioned. They have gone into hiding. Other members of my House Guard have gone to Stilstead to provide safety to the village."

Iris listened intently as Lady Arden spoke, her eyes bright with interest. *I'm glad she's actually doing something.*

Lady Arden's gaze flickered to Kaira before returning to Iris. "The Marauder Prince has been a thorn in Lehelias's side for far too long. Unfortunately, I do not have anyone available to find him, let alone kill him. The man has been causing chaos throughout the Queendom. He's raided several villages, and I will not have him doing the same within my demesne."

Taking down a notorious criminal would certainly help her gain recognition in Lehelia. “What's the reward?” she asked, already calculating how much she could ask for her services.

“Five hundred gold from the Queendom,” Lady Arden replied. “I will pay it from my coffers, which will count toward a lesser tax burden later, so it is no issue. But that's not all. If you, Miss Stuart, were to complete this quest, I would not only ensure your citizenship, but I would also use the notoriety you gain to support the creation of the guild.”

Iris considered Lady Arden's words, her eyes darting to the others before focusing on the noblewoman. “From what I've seen, I am not sure I can do such a quest alone. He doubtlessly has dozens, if not hundreds following him. I need more adventurers, a party if you will,” she said with a determined expression.

Kaira, who had been listening quietly, spoke up. “Lady Arden, I would like to offer my support to join this quest. With my experience, I believe I could be a valuable asset.”

Lady Arden considered Kaira's offer before nodding her approval. “Very well, Captain Harken. I authorize you to accompany Adventurer Stuart on this quest,” she stated before turning back to Iris. “I suddenly find myself with another way to assist. You need more adventurers, and I want to ensure you and I start off on a positive note as you join the Guild Council.”

Iris looked at Lady Arden curiously, waiting for her to continue. Lady Arden leaned forward, her eyes glinting with excitement. “Captain Harken, I authorize you to recruit three additional members of the Guard to Miss Stuart's cause,” she said. “Miss Iris, with their aid I expect that you will have a better chance of success and can complete your quest,” she explained with a small smile.

Iris nodded, grateful for the additional support, but also feeling the weight of the task ahead. She knew that capturing or killing the Marauder Prince would not be an easy feat, but with the aid of Kaira, the three additional Guard members, and her own skills, she was determined to see it through. “Thank you, Lady Arden. We will not disappoint you,” she said with a small smile of her own.

After all, this is what I was brought here for.

Iris felt a sense of relief as the meeting drew to a close. She had not been sure what to expect from Lady Arden, but she was grateful for the support and resources that the noblewoman had offered. She turned to Kaira and Sera, nodding to them in appreciation.

She leaned close to Kaira. “Thanks,” she said. “Mocha and I will be glad to have you with us.”

Kaira nodded, smiling warmly. "Of course," she said. "I couldn't let you run off into danger alone ago. Who knows what may explode next."

Sera smirked at that, then turned to Lady Arden. "Thank you for your assistance, Lady Arden," she said. "We'll keep you informed of our progress, and I look forward to working with you to select an appropriate location for the headquarters."

Lady Arden chuckled, then rose to her feet. "Excellent," she said. "Brightburn's own guild must have a proper location, after all. I look forward to hearing from you."

With that, the meeting was concluded, and the group began to file out of the room. Iris felt a sense of purpose and excitement as she prepared to set out on her grand quest, surrounded by a group of capable friends.

Shit. I need new armor.

She'd... have to take a bit more time before leaving.

After exchanging goodbyes with Lady Delphina and Lord Reginald, Iris made a mental note to plan something with them after her quest. It would be nice to spend some time with them outside of the ballroom setting. With a wave, Iris turned and joined Kaira, Sera, and Tanith, who were already making their way toward the exit.

As they stepped out into the cool night air, Iris breathed in deeply, enjoying the fresh breeze. She was grateful for the break from the stifling atmosphere of the ballroom but also felt a little sad that the night was over.

I wish we could have danced more.

She turned to Kaira and Sera, smiling. "That was quite the experience, wasn't it?"

Kaira nodded in agreement. "Definitely a night to remember," she said. "But now, it's time to get to work."

Sera laughed. "At least finish the night out," she said. "Speaking of which, I'm in the mood for a drink. Who's with me?"

Tanith smiled. "You know I'm always ready for a drink."

Kaira raised an eyebrow. "After the night we've had, you want to go drinking? Didn't you have a few glasses in there?" she asked, amused.

Sera shrugged. "Why not? Haven't you heard Iris explain what adventurers do? Drinking is practically in the job description."

Iris chuckled, shaking her head. "I object to that characterization," she said, though the corners of her mouth twitched in amusement. "Plus, I quit drinking ages ago. Just ask Mocha."

Tanith snorted and Sera rolled her eyes. "Suit yourself," she said. "But after all the research I had to do this week, I need to unwind."



The two pairs split, each to their own carriage as they returned to the inn with Sera and Tanith going drinking. Kaira was ready to call it a night, and it seemed, so was Iris. Still, Iris was likely to talk to Sera a bit before the woman went to bed, after all, they shared a room.

As the carriage made its way through the busy streets of Lehelia, Kaira was lost in thought. She couldn't help but consider the gravity of the quest they'd been given. It was a dangerous thing to ask for such a small group where the Royal Army had failed. There was so much to do, and she had a feeling that Iris would not know where to start when preparing a group.

She didn't doubt the woman could handle herself. Relena knows she was probably more personally prepared than Kaira, but that didn't always translate to ensuring everything with your team meshed well. The most important part was, Kaira needed to find members for their team. People that she could trust, and people that would synergize well with Iris. After all, she was going to be the centerpiece of any group with her magic. Everyone else was there to support her.

The group would need to train, they would need equipment.

Iris needed new armor.

There was so much to do with very little time to do it. Kaira wasn't sure what the rush was, but Iris did not seem to want to slow down for literally anything.

And that was another thing. Kaira couldn't understand her feelings about the woman. She's come into her life like a fierce redheaded whirlwind, and Kaira had to admit she'd been completely swept up and away.

She wasn't sure what it was, but the woman's carefree attitude, her confidence, resilience, her *strength*...

Oh gods her strength...

The terran was everything and more in one gorgeous package.

So it was no wonder Kaira had gotten smitten the moment she saw her storm into her office. She'd taken a chance at the dance, she'd kissed the woman, and oh what a kiss. It was *shocking* how amazing it was.

Damn it, Kaira.

But that was just it. It was so much, like the rapids of a roaring river, and like an idiot she'd thought she could ride the waves.

It had only been a few days, and if Kaira was feeling this way...

"Penny for your thoughts?" Iris asked.

Kaira blinked, startled out of her reverie. She turned to Iris, forcing a small smile on her face. “What does that mean?”

Iris tilted her head. “What are you thinking?”

“Oh. Umm, just reflecting on everything,” Kaira said quietly.

You’d do it, wouldn’t you? You’d not even hesitate, just dive right into this relationship without looking back.

“Are you alright?” Iris prodded.

Kaira took a deep breath, trying to calm the racing of her heart. She looked at Iris and realized how much she cared for her. It was scary to feel this way, to want someone so fiercely, but it was also exhilarating. Kaira's mind was spinning with thoughts of Iris, and she wondered if she felt the same way.

“I’m fine,” Kaira said, forcing a smile on her face. “Just tired, I think.”

Iris studied her for a moment before nodding, but Kaira could see the concern in her eyes. She felt guilty for keeping her feelings hidden, but it was too soon, too dangerous. They were on a quest to find the Marauder Prince, and if they weren't careful, someone would end up dead.

She thought Iris would turn away and let her go back to her spiraling thoughts, but, instead, she reached out and gently squeezed Kaira's hand, offering a wordless gesture of support. Kaira looked down at their intertwined fingers, then back up at Iris, a small but genuine smile on her lips as a tingle spread throughout her body.

The two sat in silence for the remainder of the ride, but inside, Kaira was in turmoil. She didn't want to slow down, but she knew that if she didn't, she'd ruin the relationship. Kaira didn't want to lose whatever budding thing she had with the beautiful woman. She wanted more, but she had to make sure it was built on a solid foundation. If Iris was also serious, she'd understand.

Please understand.

When they slowed to a stop outside the inn, Kaira finally spoke. “We have a lot of work to do,” she said, looking at Iris. “I need to find the right people to join us on this quest, people we can trust, people who are skilled and experienced. And we need to prepare ourselves, physically and *mentally*. This won't be an easy task.”

There, I told her.

Iris nodded slowly, as if agreeing, and they both exited the carriage, she looked at the woman with a look of determination etched on her face.

This quest will test us in more ways than one.



As they walked up the stairs to her room, Iris noticed Kaira fall silent again as her face was scrunched up in thought. Once they arrived at the door, Iris turned to Kaira, trying to keep her voice soft. "Thank you for tonight," she said, smiling at the captain. "I don't know if I could have made it through the whole thing without you there by my side."

Kaira's expression softened as well. "You don't have to thank me," she said. "I enjoyed myself immensely. Thank *you* for inviting me."

Iris's heart swelled at Kaira's words, and she felt a rush of warmth spread through her. She unlocked the door and led Kaira inside. Once the door was closed, Iris turned to Kaira, a hint of hesitance in her expression. "Kaira, can I ask you for a favor?" she said.

Kaira raised an eyebrow in curiosity. "Of course," she replied. "What is it?"

Iris took a deep breath, then gestured to the back of her dress. "Can you help me out of this?" she said, feeling a flush rise to her cheeks. "I'm afraid I won't be able to manage on my own."

The woman hesitated, but then gave a curt nod and stepped closer to Iris. "Of course," she said, her voice strained but gentle. "Let me help you."

Iris turned her back to Kaira and held her long hair out of the way as Kaira began to unfasten the delicate buttons and untie the lacing that ran down the back of her dress. Iris closed her eyes and let out a small sigh of relief as she felt the fabric loosen around her. She couldn't help but feel a flutter of nerves as Kaira's hands grazed her skin.

Kaira carefully slid the dress off of Iris's shoulders, revealing the simple slip underneath. She hung the dress up in the wardrobe.

Iris watched as something changed and her heart skipped a beat. Kaira hesitated before going any further, she stood there and stared at Iris with a complicated expression. Iris could sense that something was on her mind, something important.

"Kaira? Is everything okay?" she asked.

Kaira's expression remained contemplative as she considered her words carefully. She seemed lost in thought, and Iris didn't want to push her to speak if she wasn't ready. She gave Kaira a small smile and moved closer, gently placing a hand on her arm. It was a gesture of reassurance, a way of letting Kaira know that she was there for her, no matter what. Kaira's gaze flickered to Iris's hand, then back up to her face.

Iris watched Kaira for a moment, sensing that there was more to the woman's thoughts than just preparations. "Is it the quest?" she asked softly.

Kaira sighed. "It's everything," she said. "The mission, the Guild, my future..."

Iris nodded in understanding. "It can be overwhelming," she agreed. "But we'll figure it out. Together."

The woman shook her head. "It's not... It's us as well."

Iris's heart skipped a beat at Kaira's words. "Us?" she repeated softly.

Kaira's eyes met hers, and Iris saw fear there, she knew then that it was the same fear she had. Were they moving too fast?

"I... I don't want to rush things, Iris," Kaira said, her voice barely above a whisper. "I find myself caring about you, more than I ever thought possible. Tonight proved it. But... it feels like everything is moving so quickly, and I don't want to lose what we have just started by rushing into anything."

Iris's hand tightened on Kaira's arm, but she didn't let go. "Kaira, I understand," she said, her voice just as quiet. "I don't want to rush anything either. But please know that whatever happens, I'm here for you. We can take things at whatever pace you're comfortable with."

Kaira nodded, but Iris could see the fear still lingering in her eyes. "I know," Kaira said. "And I appreciate that. It's just... this is all so new to me, Iris. I don't know if it's fate, or the gods... but I've never felt this way before, and it scares me."

Iris moved closer, wrapping her arms around the woman in a tight embrace. "I understand," she said again, her voice soft and comforting. "But please don't be afraid. We'll figure it out, together."

Kaira's voice caught in her throat, and Iris could see tears forming in her eyes. Suddenly, Kaira's resolve crumbled, and she began to cry, her shoulders shaking with the force of her emotions.

Iris felt herself nearing a breaking point, but she held strong as Kaira cried, offering her comfort and support. She could feel the weight of Kaira's emotion in their embrace, and she knew that she needed to be patient, to give Kaira the time and space she needed to sort through their feelings.

It has been so fast... why? I've never felt this way before either...

She felt herself choking up, as Kaira's sobs subsided, and the woman pulled away from Iris, wiping her tears with the back of her hand.

"I need to go, for tonight. There is so much to do," Kaira spoke softly, a hint of hesitation in her voice. "I... I will work on finding people for the quest. I need to go to work and prepare the garrison for my departure. I will be back in two days. We'll... we'll talk then, yes?"

Iris took a deep breath, trying to steady her emotions. She nodded, still holding onto Kaira.

"Yes, we'll talk then," she said, her voice a little hoarse.

Kaira squeezed Iris's hand before letting go, her expression pensive as she made her way to the door. Iris watched her go, feeling a mix of emotions swirling inside her. She was scared, but also hopeful. The important thing was to be patient and give Kaira the time to sort herself out.

And maybe figure my own shit out...

As the door closed behind Kaira, Iris felt her heart shatter into a million pieces. The weight of her emotions threatened to suffocate her, and she could feel her tears welling up. She struggled to compose herself, her hands shaking as she hastily dressed in something she could go outside with.

Her throat felt tight, and she could barely breathe as she stumbled towards the door. The room felt like it was closing in on her, and she knew she needed to escape. She needed air. She needed space to process the flood of emotions that threatened to drown her.

It was going so well. The one time this world wasn't trying to fuck me over.

Iris stumbled out of the inn, tears streaming down her face, her chest heaving with each ragged breath. She walked blindly toward the stables, her mind a jumbled mess of thoughts and feelings. It was only when she reached the door that she realized where she was going. She pushed open the door, grateful for the cool, fresh air that greeted her.

Mocha's stall was at the end of the row, and Iris walked slowly toward it, her steps unsteady, her vision blurred by tears. She made her way to Mocha's stall, and the gentle mare lifted her head, sensing her distress.

"Iris? What happened?" her horse whinnied.

Iris buried her face in Mocha's neck, letting out a gut-wrenching sob. She clung to the horse, seeking comfort in the warmth of her body, as she tried to make sense of the maelstrom of emotions raging inside her. She'd tried to be strong for so long. Tried to compartmentalize all the bad.

One simple, understandable, completely reasonable request made her break like a dam.

Mocha started fidgeting as she became more and more distressed. *"Iris, talk to me. What's wrong?"* she whinnied, her ears flicking.

"I don't know what to do, Mocha," Iris whispered between sobs. "I thought... I thought everything was going to be okay, but now I don't know. I don't know if I can handle this. I've tried for so long to be strong."

Mocha nuzzled her face, trying to comfort her. *"Iris, please."*

"It's Kaira..." Iris said. "She..."

Her horse's head jerked up, her brown eyes staring at Iris. *"Did she get hurt?"*

Iris shook her head.

Mocha huffed. *"Did she break your heart?"*

Iris nodded slowly.

Her horse shifted her weight as if she was trying to get up without hurting Iris. *"I'll fucking kill her. Where is she?"* she whinnied angrily.

Iris pulled back from the embrace, looking at her horse in surprise. Mocha had always been protective of her, but she had never seen her so angry before. She shook her head, placing a hand on the mare's neck to soothe her.

“No, Mocha,” Iris said, her voice barely above a whisper. “It's not like that. We just... we're moving too fast and Kaira wants to step back, slow down. I don't know. It felt *right*. What's wrong with me? We barely know each other and I'm already a mess.”

Mocha snorted, her eyes softening. “*I'm sorry, Iris,*” she nickered. “*I didn't mean to make it worse.*”

Iris leaned her forehead against the horse's neck, taking comfort in her best friend's touch. “It's okay, girl,” she said, her voice thick with emotion. “I'm just... I'm so confused. I don't know what to do.”

“*It's not just you. People confuse me, too. Especially you,*” Mocha nickered, making the adventurer huff out a laugh.

Iris took a deep breath, trying to steady herself. For a few moments, they lay there in silence, the only sound the soft rustling of hay as Mocha shifted her weight. Finally, Iris pulled back, looking into the mare's eyes.

“Thank you for being here, Mocha,” she said. “I don't know what I'd do without you.”

“*Come here, stay here for a while. Tell me about the ball,*” Mocha nickered.

Iris smiled, wiping away her tears. “Well... It started with me basically challenging a noblewoman to a duel...”

Mocha huffed. “*Oh shit. Here we go... Let's hear it. What army am I going to have to face down...*”

Iris laughed, wiping at her face and laughing again as she realized how much of a disaster her makeup was. “Funny that you mention that...”

Her horse froze, before whinnying, “*Don't joke.*”

“Okay, so here's what happened...”

As Iris recounted the events of the ball, she felt a sense of relief wash over her. Sharing the absurdity of her night with Mocha somehow made everything feel less overwhelming. For the first time since Kaira had left, Iris felt a glimmer of hope that things might be okay. Plus, the next day, she had to start preparing for her big quest.

I'm just being silly. Got to stay focused.