

Whatever Lies Beyond This Morning

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Whatever Lies Beyond This Morning

by [Rockets](#)

Summary

Livia survives the Praetorium instead of Gaius. Some things go differently as a result, some stay very much the same.

Listen, if you're going to bring back one dead antagonist from 2.0 as a semi-ally and try to give them a redemption arc, why would you pick Gaius "Eorzea is a mess and I just need to rule it" Baelsar? Gaius "my quarters, one hour" Baelsar?

Nah, we're throwing all that out. The Shadowhunter reveal? It's Livia. Main contact for the Weapon raids? Still Livia. But we're picking up the narrative shortly after MSQ The Ultimate Weapon, and it's a long road from Castrum Meridianum to the Burn.

Notes

Content warnings: This is in Livia POV and, listen, she's carrying a lot of trauma. Her adoptive father was having sex with her. She's in the military of an empire that was purposefully built to be dysfunctional and cause problems, even beyond the usual "it's an empire" level of dysfunctional and problem-causing. She's obsessive, angry, and has some really damaging ideas about sex and her own self-worth. She's [missing an eye](#) and just had a building dropped on her. She's going to be dealing with all that and more, and things are going to be unpleasant to start.

She turns her life around eventually, I promise.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Waking to the sound of a scratching pen was familiar to Livia. She'd spent enough nights in *his* chambers, spent enough mornings lying abed and listening to him writing reports, writing orders, always writing, writing. So, at first impression, this was a reassuringly normal way to wake. But something struck her as wrong about it; several somethings, in fact, and as the mental cobwebs slowly (*too slowly*) began to clear, she noticed more and more.

The sound of the pen was wrong. Or perhaps it was the paper; they'd been having supply issues of late, and the lower ranks had been forced to resort to locally-sourced materials of substandard quality, but that wouldn't have affected the *Legatus* yet, surely?

There was more, there was much more, why was it so hard to *think*-?

The light was wrong. Her eyes were still shut, but even so. In the mornings he liked to throw open the curtains at the window by his desk, and more often than not it was the sunlight pouring into the room that would wake her, rather than the sound of his pen itself. But it was mostly dark, wherever she was. Something red-orange was flickering dimly — a lantern, perhaps — but he didn't like to work nights. Strange.

The bedsheets were damp with sweat. That on its own would be no unfamiliar sensation, but this too was wrong, somehow. She shifted in position minutely, and that let her place it: she was *still sweating*, her skin clammy with it. She must be feverish with something, and that would also explain why she was having such a hard time putting her thoughts in order. She hadn't caught some *illness* in these savage lands, had she?

The pen though, something about the noise was still bothering her-

His desk was to the left of the bed, beneath the window on the east wall. He'd had the bed pushed up against the far wall after she'd fallen out of it one particularly energetic night.

The sound of *this* pen was coming from her *right*. Where the *wall* should be.

"I'll be with you in just a moment," said someone who, Livia was rapidly realizing, was *not* her Legatus. The voice was another dissonant mixture of reassuringly familiar and disorientingly unexpected: the accent was distinctly Garlean, some merchant or low noble from the capital, maybe. But the speaker was a woman, or at least sounded like one. "You're safe here, never fear. Don't try and sit up though, you're on a lot of painkillers and-"

Livia sat up, snapping her eyes open and shoving herself upwards with a growl. But something went wrong with even *this*, and a wave of dizziness washed over her. There was indeed someone sitting at a desk (to her *right*, where the *wall* should be) but between the gloom and her swimming vision, all Livia could make out was an impression of pale hair and elezen-long ears.

The woman half-turned to look at her and Livia got one more impression: lamplight glinting off round reading glasses, a dagger-sharp slash of dark lipstick. She said something, but there was suddenly a loud rushing in Livia's ears and she couldn't make out the words. Then she was falling into darkness, and soon remembered nothing more.

Things were much less of a struggle when Livia next woke. She opened her eyes carefully, not wanting to move just yet lest she set off whatever had happened to her previously. The light in the room had changed; diffuse sunlight lit up the place, so there must have been a window in here after all. She studied the ceiling while she tried to organize her thoughts. It was entirely stonework, a light sandy rock. Thanalan? Must be. The locals loved building with this stuff, despite the lands being rich with iron and cobalt. She'd never understood why-

Footsteps.

She shut her eyes before the door could creak open and tried to steady her breathing, but it must not have been enough, because that same voice from last night (*last* night? She didn't know, actually; it might have been longer) was soon talking again.

"Remembered my advice, did you? Good," said the woman. "But I'd prefer if you didn't play dead, not when I've put so much effort into bringing you back from the very edge of it."

Reluctantly, Livia opened her eyes once more and looked up at the face of her- captor? Rescuer? She must have frowned, because the woman gave her a *look*.

"Oh, don't be like that. I'll give you a debrief as soon as you're ready for it, don't you worry. For now, I believe introductions are in order. You can call me Ivy. I believe I know who you are, but if you could just confirm it for me...?"

Ivy. She'd never met them in person, but that was the name of her contact within the Imperial spy network in Ul'dah. Some of the tension in her shoulders eased. "Livia sas Junias," she croaked. She left her title off, just in case this Ivy was an impostor, but-

"Tribunus of the Fourteenth Imperial Legion," agreed Ivy. "It's a pleasure, ma'am. I wish it were under better circumstances, but around here I have to take things as they are, not as I'd rather they be."

"Where...?" Livia's voice was still rusty, but Ivy seemed to be able to intuit her meaning anyway.

"You're in one of our safehouses. I'm personally watching over you, do you understand? This, right now, is one of the most secure locations on this continent. Be at ease. Rest. You lost a *lot* of blood, but my healer assures me that the danger has passed. Go back to sleep. I'll wake you for dinner."

Distantly, Livia registered that Ivy was patting the back of her hand. But she was safe. *Secure*. With the tension gone, Livia suddenly found that she couldn't keep her eyes open, and soon she was asleep.

It was dark again the next time Livia woke, Ivy jostling her shoulder gently. "If you feel up to eating something," said Ivy, "I'll help you sit up and we can see how it goes."

Livia discovered that she *was* hungry now that the topic was brought up, so she nodded. They took it slowly, Ivy fussing all the while, and Livia soon found the reason for her caution: a searing horizontal line on her right side just below her rib cage that suddenly flashed into pain when she twisted too quickly. She let out a voiceless gasp, and Ivy just nodded sympathetically.

"That'll be the axe wound. The healer assures me the stitches will hold and the pain will fade with time, but it might be weeks before you're back to full strength."

A memory forced itself into Livia's mind. A tiny, feral-looking miqu'te woman was snarling at her, flinging herself through the air, dragging an enormous axe in her wake. She blinked and the moment passed. "Oh. The eikon-slayer."

Ivy thinned her lips. "Yes. But we'll get to all that later. For now, it is time for soup. I'm afraid you'll find it rather bland; if you manage to keep this down then the next meal will be something more interesting." She retrieved a tray from the desk and set it in Livia's lap.

As promised, there was soup. As forewarned, it was nearly tasteless warm water that once, perhaps, some long time ago, had been in contact with meat. It still took nearly all of Livia's energy to sip it down, even with Ivy helping steady her shaking hands.

In the morning, Livia found herself feeling much better. Ivy brought her a breakfast of thin bread and small fruit with an apologetic laugh of "Sorry, we don't get field rations out here." Afterwards, with Ivy's continuing assistance, she managed to struggle to her feet so she could be shown to the latrine. The stone floor was cold under her bare feet, and the latrine itself was laughingly primitive, but she was at last up and moving under her own power. Mostly under her own power.

"You need a wash as well," Ivy informed her, "but the healer wants to check how your injuries are doing before letting you submerge them. And even so, she warned me that I might need to help you with it when the time comes. So you'll just have to keep stinking of sweat for now," she teased with a laugh. Livia felt she really ought to be taking offense, but something about the way Ivy's painted lips curled up at the corners distracted her, and the moment soon passed.

Feeling much more like herself again, she let Ivy lead her by the hand to a small sitting room featuring a pair of long couches, an overstuffed armchair, and a small coffee table. After getting her settled in the armchair, Ivy vanished back into the bedroom before returning with a notebook and a thick file of papers.

"Now," said Ivy, "if you're feeling up to it, we can get the debrief out of the way. Better to do it sooner, while the memories are still fresh, as I'm sure you know." She licked a finger and started rifling through the file as she talked. "If you don't mind, I'd prefer that you go first. I still have to finish my report and send it up the chain, so getting your take on the events without any extra information will make it much cleaner all around."

Livia nodded, swallowing thickly. Over the next two bells she went through the sequence of events as best she remembered it. First the perimeter alarm, with Ul'dahn forces storming the

front gate but being successfully held at bay. The ceruleum had detonated, and then the traitor Garlond stole one of their Reapers and started demolishing gates and barricades and troops alike. Their anti-air emplacements were captured and turned against them, the gunship was shot down and crashed into the shield generator, and then-

"It was her, yes. The eikon-slayer at the head of an infiltration team, alongside that ungrateful traitor Garlond." Livia frowned. "The whole fight's a patchy blur now, just flashes of single images. I think her team mostly focused on capturing more of our gun emplacements while she harried me. I'd guess that was to destroy my Reaper, since I know I didn't have it later. Then she got into my blind spot, and... I don't remember anything after that." She sighed, shrugging. "Mostly what I remember is the rage. The affront. How *dare* those savages steal Imperial weaponry for their own ends? How dare they even *try* to assault the most fortified castrum on the continent? They should have been cowering in their beds! Did they not know the might of the Empire?" She was shaking again, caught up in remembered fury.

The scratching of Ivy's pen stopped for a moment, then she visibly went back and circled something in her notes. "And then without the Reaper, it was you alone against a team of, what? Eight, ten people?" she prompted. "Even taking your excellent combat skills into account, the odds don't sound to have been in your favor. Yet you stood your ground and fought them practically to your death." Ivy looked up, the light catching her glasses and making her expression inscrutable. "Why?"

The question was so unexpected that it shocked Livia out of her memories, dragging her back into the present. "Why?" she repeated, blinking. "It was my duty. My lord put me in charge of the castrum's defenses. Letting intruders through would be completely unacceptable." She gripped the arms of the chair, fingers clenching. "And besides, he himself was present in the Praetorium, and the intruders had captured our air defenses. He had no way out at that point. So of course I-

This was so *obvious*, how did Ivy not *understand* this already? Livia pressed on anyway. "I can't let him come to harm. It's unthinkable. He's my- my *lord*." The word itself didn't do the concept justice, but Livia put in every ounce of emotion she had to try and convey the meaning anyway. "He's everything to me. Everything I have, I have because of him. Everything I have *belongs* to him. So if I have to put my personal Reaper, my armor, my body, my very *soul* between him and those that would do him harm, then I will gladly do so. Because none of that matters, not compared to him."

Ivy circled something again. After a pause, she underlined it. Once, twice, pressing hard enough into the paper that Livia could hear it. "Well," she said finally. "I think that answers my questions. Thank you for bringing me up to date, ma'am." She hesitated, clearly worried about something. "I suppose it's now my turn."

After several seconds without Ivy adding anything else, Livia was forced to prompt her. "Yes...?"

Ivy took a deep breath, letting it out slowly through her nose. "Gaius van Baelsar is dead," she said without preamble.

"Wh-what...?" stuttered Livia. "No, that's- that's not possible. Your intel must be wrong."

"It's not," said Ivy grimly. "The Flame General himself personally confirmed it, and I heard it directly from his lips."

"Wh- *how!?*" Livia demanded. "He's a better fighter than I am, and he had the *Ultima Weapon* besides!"

Ivy shook her head. "That Paragon that was advising him, Lahabrea. He knew of some kind of override for the weapon and activated it at the worst possible moment. The Legatus was ejected from the cockpit, Lahabrea stole into it himself, and then he used a hidden system to detonate some kind of... it's unclear. Something like a ceruleum bomb. It leveled the entire building. Perhaps tol Scaeva would be able to give us a more detailed analysis, but he's still missing. Most of my information comes from a copy of the eikon-slayer's *own* report, although her handwriting is nearly illegible. She survived the explosion and shielded her team from it, but didn't extend that protection to van Baelsar." Ivy paused for a moment. "He's gone, ma'am. I'm very sorry."

End Notes

I can't promise regular updates, but I *can* promise I'll always care. And in the end, isn't that what really matters?

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