Chapter 100 Reunion

In the dreamscape, Xavier and Konstantin had some good fights. Xavier won almost every time, though. Whether this was a subconscious effort to put Konstantin in his place, I did not know. After watching for a good hour, I joined them. I would fight one while the other watched and then gave me feedback. Then, I would switch.

I was not sure how much I was getting from this practice, but I knew that muscle memory translated into the real world. The best part about all this work was I was getting a good night’s sleep as long as I did not make too many changes.

I spent seven hours in the dreamscape before exiting. I found my companions asleep. I took their uneaten meals down to the kitchen. The old women were just starting breakfast and scolded me for the uneaten food. They did allow me to take some rolls stuffed with hard-boiled eggs. As I entered the street, the sky was turning gray with the new day. People were already starting their day, and after a few questions for directions, I was at the baths.

Smoke billowed from a chimney; inside, I found these baths worked slightly differently. There was a steam room, a shower, and then into the hot soaking tubs. I gladly paid the silver for the bath and cleaning. I was resting in the tub when Xavier, Solomon, and Sylvester entered.

Sylvester spoke for the group, “Legionnarie Eryk, you are up early. Thought you would be recovering from last night’s—lessons.”

“I am,” I indicated the hot water.

“Fair enough,” Xavier said, sitting down across from me. He let out a sigh of contentment. Once they were all seated, he asked, “When are you off today?”

“Adrian will come and get us in the Legion Hall when he is ready. He is staying at an inn with our charge,” I replied.

Sylvester asked, “Did your company really kill an ettin? I saw the report this morning.”

“It was more luck than anything. Our bowman got a few arrows into it, and it tripped and drove the arrows into its heart,” I replied, trying not to sound smug.

“Extremely lucky as they have two hearts,” Solomon added. “Fought them once before escorting a Duke to Tegairosia. They can thick hides and take a massive beating and still fight on.”

“We must have been really lucky then,” I said quietly. I asked the mage, “Mage Sylvester, are there more creatures out and about? I heard the Bartiradian mages are summoning them.”

Sylvester nodded, which got Solomon and Xavier’s attention, “It is true. The Elven High Mage Traeliorn Kelran, a master summoner, is sneaking around the Empire. Maybe one or two of his apprentices as well.”

Everyone was silent. I broke the silence by asking, “How does summoning work?”

The mage stretched, and he did have a warrior’s body, although extremely lean. He said, “It is complex magic. It weaves displacement and mind magic together. The mage opens a portal to the creature, entices it to come through, and usually performs a task. The more powerful the mage’s affinities, the more powerful the creatures he can summon.” He stood, “That is not all there is to it. He needs to be able to locate the creatures to summon, have enough aether to do it, and also make sure the creature does not kill him if it resists. Powerful and dangerous magic.”

Sylvester stepped out, and an attendant boy handed him a robe to dry in. His two lieutenants rose to follow him. Xavier said as he left, “I hope we have a chance to practice together again.”

I left the bath and returned to the Legion Hall. Adrian had not arrived, and I tackled getting another mount. The stables only had our three horses, so I did not think the Legion Hall had anymore. I confirmed at the desk. Mage Sylvester was doing a foot patrol with his unit to train them and did not have mounts. I was referred to a horse trader outside of the city. Lucien decided to come with me when I informed him.

The horse merchant was a good mile outside the city walls, but I did not mind walking. Lucien told me where he grew up. “My father broke in horses for tilling fields. He worked for a very minor baron, and a disease swept through the herb, and the baron lost his estate. The new owners had no use for my family. I was ten back then. My father got a job as a farrier but couldn’t support my mother, two sisters, and me. When I was twelve, I left to work the fields.”

“How did you end up in the legion?” I inquired.

“Dumb mistake. A few of the young fieldhands tried to sell the harvest on the side. We were caught. It turned out for the best. The other three caught with me went into the regular army and were dead within the year. I just finished my ten years, I am debt-free, and Castile convinced me to stay another term,” Lucien said cheerfully.

We arrived at the stables and pens. Dozens of horses ran the fields. One brown horse darted toward the fence and started neighing. It looked familiar. I walked toward the mare, and I couldn’t believe it. “Ginger? Is that you, girl? What are you doing with a horse trader? Lucien, I thought she was a legion horse.”

“She was, look at her hindquarters,” Lucien said as Ginger aggressively nudged my chest. Three long scars were prominent.

The horse trader, a middle-aged man, approached us. “She just healed, but some muscle damage. Legion traded her to me, and I will be foaling her next month. She can’t run well but is strong and will be a good broodmare for a few years.”

I asked incredulously, “Why not get a healing mage?” I produced an apple into my hand and gave it to her. She munched happily on it.

The horse trader answered, “The Legion didn’t care enough, I guess.”

“How much?” I asked.

“Eryk, she will not be able to keep up,” Lucien noted.

“There is the old healer in Sobral. I will pay him to fix her up. How much?” I asked again.

“Twelve gold,” the trader said, seeing my interest.

Lucien scoffed, “Twelve? Try five.”

“She is a trained Legion warhorse with a great temperament,” he retorted.

I let Lucien bargain for me as I fed Ginger two more apples. The final cost was six gold. Which was good as a battle-trained horse would go for forty gold. Lucien inspected the scars, and it was as the trader had said. They were deep and had been healed with some healing salve. Lucien got a riding horse for the scholar as well for five gold. A little more than he wanted to pay for a nag, but the mare only needed to make it two hundred hundred plus miles to Sobral.

We stabled the horses, and I gave each an apple. Lucien asked, “How many apples do you have in your space?”

I might have been too liberal with them in front of Lucien. “Just a few left now. Most of my space is crammed with Decimus’ equipment.” He nodded, but I think he was suspicious. I rubbed down Ginger, and she enjoyed the familiarity of me.

We waited for Adrian in the barracks room. Lucien and Blaze started playing a dice game, and I watched, trying to calculate the odds. Adrian walked in just before midday. “Get the horses ready. We will be leaving after the mid-day meal.”

Lucien stood, “Adrian, do you have a moment?” Lucien walked over to Adrian, and they whispered for a bit. Adrian looked over at me twice during the conversation. Finally, Adrian turned and left.

Lucian came to me, “You can keep your horse, Eryk. If it can not keep up, we will leave it behind. The nag I bought for the scholar should be fairly slow, though.” He patted my shoulder and started collecting his things in the room.

We met Adrian and our new traveling companion in the stables. The scholar was a middle-aged man but seemed rather frail like he had never exercised a day in his life. I did not know how he was going to ride over two hundred miles to Sobral at our pace. Adrian seemed to realize this as well. When we were finally on the road, the scholar seemed to be a competent rider.

He was beside me and introduced himself, “I am Scholar Favian.”

“Legionnaire Eryk, scholar,” I replied.

“I have not been riding for a few years, but the memory returns quickly,” he said with a smile. “I am actually looking forward to this assignment. Ancient Elvish writing has always been a passion of mine. I wanted to travel to Esenhem but was always worried I might be considered a spy while I was there and one here when I returned.” He laughed at his joke, but I did not think he was jesting.

“There are a number of books from Caelora in the Duchess’ library,” I said.

“So I am told. There is actually only one Elven dialect and written language. It has remained unchanged for thousands of years. Can you believe that? Over fifteen human tongues are spoken on Desia, and just one Elven, even though there are three different races!” He said excitedly.

“It probably has to do with a standardized education system. If all the teachers teach the exact same thing, then it will propagate continuality in the language,” I replied.

Scholar Favian’s jaw would not work as he digested my words. I figured I had said too much, but I thought it was obvious and wanted to sound smart. I asked, “Is the elven tongue complex?”

“What?” He said, distracted, “Your observation is remarkably—accurate. The Elven Scholariums are remarkably more structured and strict than the Telhian. Most children are taught only a few years before their education is ended. Most can not even read effectively.”

I just nodded and let him talk about the shortcomings of the Telhian education system for the next two hours. My question about the Elven language was now buried in the scholar’s expose. I was able to hand him off to our red alchemist, and they got into a deep discussion about the origin of the names of herbs used in alchemy.

I got to ride next to Adrian. “That scholar loves to talk. Hopefully, he is what Castile wanted,” Adrian mumbled to himself. He looked at me, “What do you plan to do with your horse? We don’t always ride, you know.”

I was stumped as I had not thought that far ahead. I felt connected to Ginger and didn’t want her used by the horse trader. I also wanted to see her healed. Adrian interrupted my thoughts, “Well, she should be able to keep up. We will make Sobral in six days. It’s a day later than planned, but there’s no need to press. The alchemist is the one slowing us down. He is in rough shape, and I think he might cry if I ordered a gallop. Scholar Favian may look frail, but he used to be a messenger rider for the army.”

After a few minutes, I asked, “How rough will the ride be?”

“Not very. This is one of the old trade roads before the portals. There are still dozens of towns along it. We should be spending most nights in an inn. Maybe not the luxury accommodations you seek, but better than being outside,” he smiled. A smile signaled he felt good about his assignment almost being done.

A few hours later, dark storm clouds appeared overhead, and it started raining buckets. The packed clay and dirt road quickly turned to mud, and the rain was so heavy visibility was limited to a few dozen feet. I think Adrian had cursed our easy ride back to Sobral.