Chapter 107

Gammon, Loriel’s Wolfguard, guarded the private function room in the Shiny Platinum.  Seeing me approach, he opened the door and let me enter like I needed permission to.  It was my damn restaurant.  I entered the room, and Loriel was at the large wooden table with seating for twenty-three.  Six communication stones were in front of her with dozens of sheets of parchment.  She had a bowl of fries and two dipping sauces to her right as she went through the documents, adding oil marks to them as she went.

She ignored me as I moved to the table and picked up some documents.  She didn’t stop me as I read through them.  I was quickly engrossed.  It was a population study of the Skyholme islands.  It forecasted each island’s maximum population based on land, dungeons, and trade resources.  The next sheet was construction costs for building materials sourced from the lowlands and dungeons.  She was planning a population boom for Skyholme.  I put down the sheets, and she looked at me with sunken eyes.  It looked like she had not slept in days.

Loriel sounding scolding in her tone, “Storme, I don’t know what to do with you.  You abandoned Bylura in Goldreach.  And now you come to me with multiple requests.  You want to know where Aelyn and Niserie fled to.  You want me to help you purchase the warehouse adjacent to this building.”  She had a serious look plastered on her face.  We were in the room alone, and I felt my anger rising.

I went on the offensive, “Do not test my patience, Loriel.  I am not your toy soldier to play with.  I delivered Bylura and the Torrent Ambassodor.  The warehouse purchase was just a question to make the process easier.”  I sat at the table across from her.  “You will not hold the Heart Stone over me any longer.  I have more than made up for it by helping Admiral Sebastian.”

Her lips pursed, and she pulled a document from a pile near her and reconsidered her words, “You have not responded to the Admiral’s recent request.”  She took another document.  “If you take care of the Admiral’s request, I will give you either this,” she held up the document, “or I will tell you what I know about Aelyn’s whereabouts.”

My eyes narrowed.  Had Sebastian betrayed me and revealed the extent of my abilities of metal shaping to Loriel?  I leaned back in my chair and studied Loriel.  Did she actually know where Aelyn and her mother traveled to, or was this a bait and switch?  “What did Sebastian tell you?”

Loriel cracked a small smile, “That you were the only one who could get it done in the narrow time frame, we needed it done.” I was confused as Sebestain’s letter said that he needed me in two months.

“Are we talking about the three Wasp-class ships on Stonefell Island?” I tried to ferret it out.

“No, we are talking about the refurbishment of the Heaven’s Descent. The Harbinger moored in the lake on Stonefell Island,” she said while continuing to smile. “It was decommissioned about one hundred years ago and used as a retreat for the Miaden’s. The platinum and gold enchanting materials were stripped. The hull has been maintained, but the wood used in the construction is not as well acclimated to aerial combat. I need a trade ship for my private enterprises.”

I sat there observing Loriel, trying to figure her out. She obviously knew I had a metal shaping spell from Isla and my work with Sebastion. She probably did not realize it was an ability and not a spell. She also could probably guess I had a massive aether pool. I finally spoke, “The value you offer is short of my services. I assume you need me to keep this quiet from the other members of the Triumvirate?” I added, and you will need to provide the material.

Loriel relaxed in her seat and drank the frost mead. Then refilled her glass from the pitcher on the table. I felt like I was doing exactly what she wanted, even though she seemed indecisive. “No,” she tapped the scroll that I assumed was a deed to the warehouse. “This building is worth twenty-five thousand gold. You need to supply the materials for the enchanting.”

I scoffed, “I paid seven thousand for the Shiny Platinum. And enchanting a ship the size of the Harbinger would cost you ten thousand gold to pay an artificer.” Her lips twitched, realing how informed I was.

“The land value has massively increased near the skyship platforms and is going to shoot up even further once the peace and trade treaty with the Sadians is finalized,” she countered. “I paid twenty thousand gold a month ago for the warehouse.” Her eyes sparkled as I realized she had been planning this.

“The land is only valuable because of the Shiny Platinum. We have a thousand customers through the door every day.” Her smile betrayed her. I remained impassive as I stated, “Maybe I will shut down the restaurant and move it to the upper city. I just need the apartments anyway. I could do better business closer to the Adventurer’s Hall.” Her eye twitched, telling me I had struck a blow. Without the traffic from the Shiny Platinum, her warehouse would lose a lot of value.

She pulled the loose sheets together in front of her. She was measuring her response to my threat. I knew she was rich but would probably lose ten thousand gold if I followed through. She had the files in there proper folder and said, “You will supply forty pounds of gold. I will supply twenty pounds of gold, fifteen pounds of platinum, and one pound of mithril.” I did the math conversion in my head. Twenty pounds of gold was 6,400 gold from my pockets. Her gold, platinum, and mithril investment was valued at 43,200 gold.

I added, “I want no build clauses for the plaza between the Shiny Platinum and the skyship platforms. Also, you will return the lease paperwork for the room you have at the Shiny Platinum.” The plaza was city land, but I could see them building something there just to leverage me in the future. I had kept Isla in my employ, and she had been using Loriel’s room.

Loriel frowned at the two additional conditions, even though they would cost her nothing. She reached out and tapped the document that supposedly had the information on where Aelyn went. It was a ploy and her last card to play by drawing my attention to it. I ignored her as she tapped her fingers on it, pretending to think. When I did not budge or change my request, she nodded slowly, “Agreed. When the artificing work is complete, you will have the deed to the building. Here is the contract for the apartment.” She pulled out an easily accessible document from a folder like she had been prepared to hand it over. “When can you complete the work?”

“When will you have the precious metals at the ship?” I retorted.

“Everything is there now,” she said with a Chesire grin. “I will have to remove forty pounds of gold, but you can start when you are ready.”

Had I been played, or had she been prepared for multiple scenarios? I think she has improved her manipulation skills. I started doing the math, and I thought I won the encounter. Damn it, I had won it financially, but not politically or intelligence-wise. Was she hoping to find out something from me? Forty pounds of gold—that was a lot of gold coins. Did she suspect I could create metal or had a secret source?

“I will need to sell some things in the lowlands to come up with that much gold. I can leave on this sixth day and return on the seventh day. On the following sixth and seventh day, I can work on your Harbinger.” I caught her eye twitch almost imperceptively. So was that her game? Trying to find the source of my coin. She probably no longer considered Wynna and Callem my benefactors then. Had Callem slipped up, then?

“That is acceptable,” she replied after a pause. She looked at the apartment contract she had handed me and seemed to be reconsidering the trade. She had obviously not gotten the full value she wanted from this transaction. She called for two attendants waiting to pack everything up so she could return to the capital.

I had to admit Loriel was good for Skyholme. If she did open trade with the Sadians, then a world of possibilities could open. After she left, I returned to my room and pulled Sebastian’s communication stone out of my storage. I called Sebastian, and he answered immediately.

The conversation centered around the three Wasp-class ships the Navy was building on Stonefell. They would be crewed by a mixed crew of Wolfguard and Navy and responsible for quick response to threats. I slowly turned the conversation to Loriel, and he knew nothing about the Heaven’s Descent.

He knew the ship existed, but not that Loriel was trying to make it skyworthy again. It was over five hundred years old and used inferior bulwark planking. Building a new ship rather than refurbishing the old one was easier. He had no idea how the Miadens had gotten their hands on it. I did not sense any deceit from Sebastian and told him I was willing to artifice the new ships when they were ready.

Kiara and Ardial we anxious for dinner, and I fed them as I cleaned the room. After they ate and I trained them, I got my short report from Bleiz while eating dinner that was delivered from downstairs to my room. Marcellus had hired two replacement cooks. I was not going to eat hamburgers every meal, so one of the new cooks was being trained as my personal cook. He was preparing my lunch for school and my dinner for the evening. I would give him feedback if I liked it or not. Tonight was a shepherd’s pie that was fairly good. I wrote a note saying it was good but to try ground lamb next time.

Bleiz’s report was not pretty. Freya was fine, but Gareth had been out drinking in the city last night and came home extremely early. He had a minor scuffle with men at the tavern—predicably over a woman he was defending. Beliz heard the story from Freya who had actually heard it from our father, who was in charge of the security on the skyship platforms after his recent promotion. His small yearly salary in Hen’s Hollow had been around ten gold plus equipment. Now he was making almost a gold a week plus equipment and was in charge of twenty-seven men.

My mother had her own leather engraving business as well. It was a small shop that I was renting for her. She mostly did large volume commissions for the Navy and guards. She didn’t like doing the same thing over and over, but the coin was good, and she handled a few small requests on the side.

I needed to talk with Gareth this week. He was starting to get out of control. The only other news was Bleiz had started teaching Freya how to fight. They were starting with short blades. Monty also did not like the lessons, as he tried to attack Bleiz when they mock-fought. I thought it was funny, Bleiz did not.

After dinner was my studying, and I had to lock the beasts in the bedroom as they kept seeking attention. I knew I was close to the invisibility spell. Any day now, and I would have it imprinted. I brought the cats with us to the training room, and Bleiz and I practiced for an hour. I used an array of spells to easily overcome Bliez. Bleiz had three spells now, cleanliness, wind shield and privacy.

Wind shield was useful in deflecting attacks and creating a cushion when landing from a high jump. He was using the privacy spell to further mask his sound when invisible. He was doing well with his magic and was now working on the arcane lock spell. He had given up trying to learn the dimensional box spell for now.

I was in bed with the cats after the practice and quick use of the cleanliness spell. Although they were on their way to being trained, I still set alarms to trigger if they moved on me. Right now, with their heads only being slightly larger than my fist, I was not concerned.

After my morning routine, I was off to the academy for conditioning and team combat. I grabbed two egg and bacon sandwiches on my way out and found my lunch in kitchen. I was a little stunned to find personal cook was a middle-aged woman. I just had not met her yet and assumed Marcellus had hired another male cook. I ended up talking with her for a few minutes to get my preferences down. Her name was Krysta, and she had three children. She took the job for the pay and free food.

I was late for the conditioning, but it was just simple calisthenics. We were lined up in rows and did them together. Since I was already working out twice a day alone, I decided this would be my last conditioning class. Sleeping one day a week would be welcome as I already felt fatigued after two days. I knew once I got into the routine, I would be fine.

The combat training was at least useful. We went over common command words and hand signals for the first hour, some of which I was familiar with. In the second hour, we practiced our roles, which humorously meant I was protected in the center of the formation while I hurled spells. Then we moved to some mock combat. Over the weeks, the combat would become real, but for now, they were training in understanding roles. Mia and Fera were focused on learning even though they would probably never delve. Fera had tried once and did not have a great experience.

After team combat, I went to Neelan’s library. He had trusted me with a key right after becoming my advisor and mentor. I quickly found out why as I entered the small library, I found Neelan having tea with Selina. “Storme!” Selina smiled brightly, “You have not visited me in the capital, so I thought I would come to see you and catch up with old friends.”

I closed the door, “I am sure. How old of a friend?”

“Neelan knows who I am,” she smiled brightly while pouring me some tea.

I put everything together, “So you arranged for Neelan to be my advisor so you could keep an eye on me?” I took the tea and sat with them.

Neelan chucked, “She called you a generational talent. I admit I was curious.”

I talked with the mages—well, mostly listened to two friends catch up and talk mage politics. There was unease with the policies Loriel was instituting. They were worried there might be a flood of powerful mages to Skyholme looking to spend their retirement teaching in a relatively safe realm. While that would be good for Skyholme it was not good for the mages they might displace.

My input to the conversation indicated that there might also be an influx of students. So as long as the ratio remained relative, then the old mages would still be needed. They then started talking about recruitment and increasing testing for candidates. I stood and walked the shelves, looking for a book to borrow. Neelan had said I could borrow one book at a time and that was why I was here.

He had about thirty spell books, but nothing struck my fancy besides greater restoration, a tier-four spell. I had learned the lesser restoration, tier three spell. This spell was essentially a regeneration spell. My lesser restoration could regenerate as well with several evolutions, but this spell did it more efficiently and right after imprinting.

I passed on the spell for now enough though it would only take two spell slots on my matrix to learn. I found a section of books on monster anatomy and a whole chapter on displacer beasts. The books I had detailed how to butcher the beasts but not how to understand their anatomy for effective healing. It was only a twenty-page chapter, but I indicated to Neelam I was borrowing it. “Can I commission a copy of the books I borrow?” I asked.

Selina laughed, “I enchant my spell books so they can not be copied. This is how you check,” she took the book and tore the first page slightly. She then watched it closely, and nothing happened. She then took one of her spell books from her bag of holding out and tore the page. It slowly repaired itself. She explained, “An excellent enchantment to prevent people from stealing your works and making your texts last for centuries.” Seeing my expression, she grinned and said, “I will get you the runic patterns for the back and front covers.”

I nodded, sat with them for an hour, and half listened to the conversation trying to be sociable. Selina talked me up and tried a few times to get me to transfer to the Mage Academy. It was not tempting as I would be spending forty hours a week studying and taking exams and practicals. I wanted the freedom to choose what to focus on.

I left the two still talking and returned to the Shiny Platinum. After I fed and trained the cats I took out some maps. I needed to decide where I was going this sixth and seventh day in order to generate forty pounds of gold in trade.

I tapped on a city I had highlighted in my notes. It was some thirty thousand miles from Skyholme. The city was Hakeam, the capital of the Callistro Federation. I was interested in this city because they sold tier six and tier seven crystals. It would be an expensive trip, but I could possibly upgrade the Maelstrom primary power source.

To prepare, I needed to think like a merchant. I was going to need a lot of coin to get what I wanted.