Chapter 94 The Purge

Callem’s arm twisted awkwardly, and his leather armor smoked before me. I activated my *lightning reflexes* and went right into overdrive. I took a quick look at Aelyn, who was unconscious. I could wake her with a quick touch but instead raced toward Callem. I hoped Aelyn might stay unconscious and not be involved in the battle further. I used my flash heal from my *lesser restoration* spell on Callem and did a quick diagnostic.

Callem’s body was a wreck under the diagnostic spell; damaged organs, broken bones, cuts, and internal bleeding. The flash heal was the only version of the restoration I could use while under the influence of overdrive. Although I was moving faster, channeling aether outside of my body to others took the same time. The flash heal should have stabilized Callem.

It had been less than a second, and I moved to join Bleiz on the stairs. He was being pressured back and was bleeding freely from some deep cuts. I yelled, “Disengage to the right, and I will take over.” Bleiz did as he was told, flinging two daggers at the two uninjured Wolfguard to cause a pause in their attack as he jumped off the stairs to the right.

“Give Callem some healing potions,” I screamed as I cast a dual-layer aether shield to block one of the Wolfguard and went hard at the other. One of the aether shields shattered quickly from an attack as my heavy falchion met a buckler on the other Wolfguard. Sparks flew as the buckler had some type of magical enchantment on it. My powerful weapon enchantments did not penetrate the buckler.

The Wolfguard stabbed his long sword at me in a practiced motion, and I smiled grimly. My speed allowed me to parry and then sweep my falchion low. Normally the high ground would be an advantage but not to someone moving as fast as me.

The *sharpness* enchantment on my falchion took both legs below the knee of the Wolfguard, who crumbled to the ground, spurts of blood pumped from the femoral artery. He tried to get dying revenge on me but had no leverage without legs, and I just parried the weak swing and backed down the stairs as my second aether shield was destroyed was destroyed by the other Wolfguard.

I exchanged twice with the other remaining Wolfgaurd before surprising him with a lightning-fast two-handed thrust at his chin after a strong parry. The tip of the blade went into his surprised throat. I twisted the blade hard and retreated back to Callem’s side. My fight had taken seconds, and Bleiz was just now pouring the potions in his throat. The famed Wolfguard couldn’t handle my speed or instincts honed over many nights at Twin Rocks. The legless Wlfguard was trying to consume a potion, and I flashed to him and shattered the vial.

I watched the life leave his eyes. I had killed without hesitation. And I felt—nothing. I thought I might have felt sick or guilty for taking the life of a sapient, but no. Maybe my time in the dungeon had cured me. I didn’t have time to reflect on it.

I spun around, “Did you see the mage?” I asked Bleiz. Knowing he was the real threat.

Bleiz looked up in shock at the two Wolfguard bleeding out in quiet death throes. He caught his tongue, “No, didn’t see anyone besides the two Wolfguard, but neither of them is a spell wielder. It is going to take time for the old man to recover from the potions. We should retreat.”

I slowly nodded, but a noise from the other end of the hallway had us look up to find Gareth running at us. He had a few cuts but didn’t look the worse for wear. He reached us, “Another skyship is landing. I think the Bricios called for help. I cut down a dozen men trying to get in, but that new skyship had dozens of Wolfguard on its deck in Bricio’s colors. We have just minutes.”

My mind raced. We were trapped in the tower. Below us would be Wolfguard reinforcements, and above us would be Halifax, Abaddon, and possibly Otieno. So coming here was a bad idea. I decided on a course of action, “Gareth, give Aelyn a potion, stash her in a room, then stay with Callem until he is on his feet. We will clear the next floor. I can use an *arcane lock* on the heavy door at the top of these stairs to slow them down. We need to get to Otieno and Halifax. Bleiz, follow me.” If we stayed where we were, it would be over quickly. I needed to get all the enemies in front of us and not sandwich us from both sides.

Bleiz vanished as I turned and raced up the stairs. Surprise was our best weapon right now. A large chamber opened up at the top of the stairs. Reaching the open floor plan, I moved to the right immediately to avoid any surprise attack.  Nothing came.

This looked like some ballroom with doors on the perimeter.  The ceiling had large arches with aether lights embedded at their zenith.  I didn’t see anyone, and my heart was pounding in my ears. There had to be enemies here somewhere.  Callem had said the second level was offices, and this floor was residences.  Then where did the stairs on the far end of this large room go?   The spire was much taller, so there had to be more floors.

Bleiz whispered, “I can sense people in the rooms to the right.  I don’t sense anyone to the left.”  I nodded in the direction of the invisible Bleiz and moved to the first door on the left.  “No one inside this one,” he rasped at me. I opened the door anyway t search it.  Inside was a large room sitting room with doors to bedrooms.  The furnishings were opulent. So there were living apartments on this floor.

As I left the room, Callem reached the floor staggering, and a look of annoyance on his face.  I turned off my lightning reflexes to conserve aether and immediately healed my minor strains from using the spell.  Callem located me and spoke, “It was Baladon.  He was at the top of the stairs.”  Aelyn appeared from behind Callem, and I pursed my lips.  I wanted her tucked in one of the rooms.  She didn’t need to be involved any further.  Gareth was the last to enter and shut the door.

I walked to the door Gareth and cast my *arcane lock* spell as everyone huddled around me.  Callem spoke, “I have only been here once, long ago.  I was escorting Lillian Torrent to meet Otieno Bricio.  I didn’t know there were more floors,” he pointed his sword at the stairs on the far side.  “I am guessing the upper floors will hold the people we are seeking.”  I was layering a number of *alarm* spells on the door to slow down the reinforcements.

“Callem, the rooms on the right have some people in them.  I think they are the Bricio servants,” I explained.  “Let me heal you first,” I placed my hand on him and completed the work that the potions had started. He was also poisoned with a tier 2 neural blocker. I had no idea how he was still moving, but I purged the poison, and relief flooded his face. It took almost a minute, but getting our best warrior back to health was important. Callem was much thinner from all the healing work. I checked Gareth and Aelyn as well before we went to the doors.

We quickly worked through the rooms on the right, and they were all indentured servants, thirty-four of them, their binding tattoos clearly displayed on their necks as they huddled together.  Callem pulled out one older woman who had no tattoo on her neck.

“You are Sylph Bricio,” Callem stated sternly.  Her eyes went wide in surprise at being recognized.  “This is Halifax’s sister,” he explained. “She always was a bit of a coward.  Probably thought she could hide with the servants and remain overlooked.”  The old woman’s sour face told us Callem had guessed correctly.  He addressed the old woman, “I am hurt you don’t remember me, Sylph.  We don’t have time to catch up,” Callem said with some mock malice. “How many Wolfguard are on the floors above?  And is Otieno upstairs?”

The old woman was quiet, and I thought she might stall.  She finally gave in under Callem’s stare.  “Five.  There are five Wolfguard upstairs.  Most of Otieno’s command is escorting the lesser Wolfguard or getting ready to assault the Citadel.”

She grinned and turned to gloating, “You are too late.  The city has been purged of Torrent and Miaden blood, and the Citadel will be swarmed in hours. We thought a small army was attacking when we saw the skyship crash into the Harbinger. Instead, it is just four of you! If you surrender now, we can promise a pleasant death.”  Callem tightened his grip on his blades.

Aelyn came forward and said, “She has some mental guards, but I think she is telling the truth.” Callem nodded to Aelyn, who stepped back and focused on the woman again.

“Is Otieno in the spire?”  Callem angrily forced out.  I felt a wave of killing intent wash off of Callem.  It was thick, and it felt like a true predator was crushing me.  It was enough to scare the old woman.  Urine pooled under her.

She forced out resignedly, “Yes, Otieno is upstairs.”  After the confirmation, Callem’s blade flashed to her and back, and the woman’s hands went to her throat.  Blood pooled out from her fingers, and she slowly fell to the floor as the servants cowered.

I followed Callem out of the room in shock, and he explained, “Sylph married a friend of mine, Dresden Torrent.  Dresden was poisoned after she was with her first child.  She resumed her Bricio last name, and sold his assets to Otieno for protection.  Since the Bricios control the courts, no investigation or charges were brought. She has been judged now.”  I fell in step with Callem.

“Callem, can we win?”  I asked hesitantly. “We probably should have found out if they had more than one mage upstairs as well.”

Callem’s eyes were locked forward as he walked, “You are right. I let anger cloud my judgment,” he centered himself. “Depends on which Wolfguard are with Otieno.  He has two powerful mages in his retinue but may have added more in the last twenty years.” He sighed, “You should use your discs to escape out a window down the backside of the tower.”

Gareth, who had been listening, spoke, “We are not going to leave you, Callem. If we can cut off the head of this snake, maybe those coming from below will stop.” It was a false hope but still a reason to press on.

As we got the steps going up, my first *alarm* spell went off, causing a loud boom to echo from below. The image that flashed in my mind was two young Wolfguard trying to open the door. I spoke, “It looks like it is the lesser Wolfguard. An element of their attack on the Citadel was probably diverted here since they arrived so quickly. That door is thick and will take time to bask down.” Another boom went off as my next alarm spell was triggered. “If they have a mage, though, it will take less than a minute to get through.”

It was a circular staircase, and Callem was in the lead, with me behind him. I turned my head, “Aelyn stay at the bottom of these stairs and rush up to alert us when they break through.” I checked my aether next. I was down to about 80% of my max. She gave me a pained look but then nodded.

We slowed as we got to the next floor. Another heavy door barred our way. Bleiz came forward and listened, “I can sense something feint. They are not close to the door.”

Callem opened the door, and a small fire explosion washed up his arm. It was a weak version of an evolution for the *alarm* spell. It hadn’t fazed him, and I healed him before he opened the door. The expansive circular floor was open with large windows along the perimeter. I assumed it offered a spectacular view, but all our attention was focused on the far side of the room. Five Wolfguard stood in front of Otieno Bricio. To his right was Abaddon with four men in Navy uniforms. To his left were Baladon and Halifax. A number of others in Bricio marked clothes stood behind them. I immediately noticed Baladon was charging another fireball.

Shit. I needed to decide as it was getting bigger and bigger the longer I hesitated and the more aether he invested. I rushed forward in *lightning reflexes* overdrive again. Callem had said something to try and stop me, but I had a plan—not a good plan but a plan. I was 100 feet across the room and raised my falchion to appear as much of a threat as possible. I needed Baladon to target me and not our group. One of the Wolfgarud rushed to attack me at Otieno’s direction, but Baladon had already decided his target was my group.

I was only 40’ from him when he released the roiling ball of flame. He was aiming at my companions, but I juked into the fireball path and had all three of my aether shields stacked in front of me at a 45-degree angle. I planned to direct the blast straight up. Then Callem, Gareth, and Bleiz could engage while I healed.

The fireball glanced off my shield…damn it was huge…it bounced straight up, but it exploded before it hit the ceiling. My world went white as I was thrown away like a rag doll. All the windows shattered, and almost everyone was thrown to the ground. The Bricios took as much damage as I did, as the blast was closer to them than my companions. Spell defenses flared, and a few of the men and women did not move after the wave threw them.

I rolled to my feet when I came to my senses, activated flash heal, and then focused on healing my ears as both had ruptured. My eyes were next as the heat of the blast had burned them to blindness. I couldn’t cast my *thermostatic aura* in the short time I had in my rush toward Baladon. That spell would have saved me from a lot of this heat damage. The groans echoing around me meant no one had escaped unscathed. I stumbled to my feet, and started hearing blades clashing. When my eyes focused, Callem was engaged with two smoking Wolfguard missing much of their fur and Abaddon. Gareth was occupied by the four naval soldiers and one person I did not recognize.

The lone Wolfguard that had charged me was standing but clearly blinded near one of the windows. Bleiz appeared and unceremoniously kicked him out the shattered window before charging to help into the melee to help Callem. It was utter chaos as not many people had defenses against concussive blasts.

Setting off a fireball that size in this room had been a mistake. I guess they didn’t teach thermal expansion in mage school. Well, Baladon had planned for the fireball to explode on the far side of the chamber in the midst of my team. If that had worked, my group would have borne the brunt of the blast and heat. Instead, I managed to catch the entire Bricio group in the blast, using up a lot of their defensive magics and enchantments and causing injuries they were wasting time healing.

I slowly finished my healing while cranking up my overdrive again, which had been cut off when I had briefly knocked out. My target was Halifax Bricio. Aelyn had said the man wanted to kill my sister in front of me, and for that, he was going to die. I rushed forward, and he had recovered enough to see me. Four men from the back row joined Halifax as I engaged him. They probably thought five on one were good odds and overpowering me would be easy.

I started swearing immediately as the exchange of weapons started. I was ridiculously faster than the five of them, but they had magic galore. Every death blow was met with a flash preventing my blade from reaching flesh. Baladon had recovered, too, and was sucking down a healing or aether potion. I couldn’t tell as I was thoroughly occupied. Callem was being pressed, but Bleiz was almost to him to flank the Wolfguard. Abaddon had switched off to join his Navy men in attacking Gareth. Gareth had taken down one of the Navy officers but was barely holding his own now that he was surrounded.

I tried a surprise move. I moved to the group of men and women in the back who hadn’t joined the fray and were still licking their wounds from the explosion. My move surprised them and cut down two men instantly. Being here, I assumed they were essential members of the Bricio family and didn’t have solid combat abilities. If there was a good chance we would not live today, I wanted to kill as many Bricios as possible. I made the mistake of leaving a woman alive as I found a dagger in my back when I turned to my next target.

The bitch got through my leather armor and into my scapula. I couldn’t heal it until the blade was removed. I retreated and was pursued. The group sensed blood. I pulled the dagger and healed enough to engage the first brave soul to catch, who suddenly looked frightened as I turned on him in a furry. His magic armor didn’t hold from my three successive strikes. The last strike penetrated his skull through his eye socket. With him down, my first domino had fallen, and I figured I was in a good position to take the rest.

A lance of fire burned suddenly into the side of my chest. It was launched by Baladon, who had recovered. Now that I was aware he was back in action, my enhanced reflexes would prevent him from striking me again. I sneaked a peak at Bleiz and Callem. They were both seriously wounded but only had two Wolfguard remaining. The other two had been injured and were now neutralized. We had a chance to win this fight—before being overrun with dozens of Wolfguard reinforcements.

The room suddenly went into shadow. A skyship blocked a series of blown-out windows. A flash of hope quickly ended as I heard Otieno scream for everyone to get on board. The ship was not here to save us.

Baladon was the first to run to the skyship, abandoning his kin, but I suspected he was almost out of aether after the two large fireballs. I decided Halifax was not getting away from me and blocked him from escaping. The other three Bricios I was fighting fled as they abandoned Halifax to the speed mage with the big sword—me.

Halifax was a good swordsman, and only my increased speed had kept me alive to this point. Now that Halifax no longer had support, I was quickly able to drain all his defense artifacts. The panic on his face grew as I would not let him pass to reach the hovering skyship. He threw a metallic ball at me, and I reflexively caught it. My metal sense went into the ball instantly and evaporated the spell array. The ball contained a large earth explosion spellwork, and if the ball had touched the floor, I would have been pierced by earth spikes. I sent the ball to my dimensional space to a stunned Halifax.

He roared and charged, engaging in a flurry of attacks. I guessed he planned to feint and get past me to the skyship. He abandoned his defense, not wanting to risk being left behind. I used an *aether shield* to prevent him from swinging his sword, and my enchanted blade slid into his unprotected heart and out his back—all his defense runes had been consumed. I twisted the blade and extracted it before he could get any revenge on me.

Abaddon screamed in frustration, seeing me kill his father. Gareth had not let the skyship captain disengage to help. I don’t think Baladon was even aware his father was dead, as he was already below decks on the skyship.

My goal was completed, and I took stock of the room. The surviving Bricios were jumping out the window to the skyship. Abaddon launched a furious and angry assault on Gareth. Gareth was down on one knee, four dead men around him, and Baladon standing over him. I couldn’t reach him in time. Bleiz and Callem still had two stubborn Wolfguard remaining but couldn’t break away. I focused on Gareth and tried to use my *exchange ability* for the first time…there was a block.

Shit, I forgot about the Heart Stone. I started sprinting toward my friend, hoping to reach him before Abaddon delivered the final blow. I suddenly got disoriented and sick when I got within twenty feet of him. I had drained most of my aether pool and activated my *exchange ability*. My aether pool had been half full, so it took 2000 aether to use at 20 feet. I quickly realized the Heart Stone didn’t prevent teleportation but massively increased the cost. I skidded to a stop, turned to face Baladdon, and ended my *lightning reflexes* before I bottomed out my aether and got ill from it.

Abaddon’s face was shocked. Gareth was standing up, holding his bleeding side. Callem had taken a Wolfguard sword to his side in an attempt to reach Gareth as well. Most of the living Bricios were on the ship. Callem looked at me and the remaining people, “Storme, don’t let Otieno get away!”

Well fuck. I had about 1% of my aether remaining. That was just 40 aether! I couldn’t use *lightning reflexes*. To make matters worse, Gareth rasped, “Storme, I was just luring him in closer. I had everything under control.” Abaddon took stock and turned and ran out the window, figuring I was not a good match for him. I couldn’t chase him. Otieno was also retreating like a master villain, his two remaining Wolfguard backing away with him.

The two remaining Wolfguard were excellent fighters as they had minimal damage and were protecting Otieno’s escape. I moved behind Callem and started to heal him as we followed the back-peddling Wolfguard. As Callem healed, he whispered, “Otieno has no remaining shields. I can take him down if you distract the Wolfguard.”

I whispered, “I am out of aether. I used it to save Gareth.” I felt Callem’s body tense in frustration under my hand, healing him. Callem’s injuries were extensive, and I had no idea how he had still been fighting. He had three types of poisons in his blood to make him weaker, slower, and feel pain more intensely. They were tier 1 and tier so I cleared them from his system and felt Callem go on alert.

The smugness of Otieno walking away made me go all in. I whispered, “Ok Callem we will give you an opening.” I commanded, “Bleiz, Distract the Wolfguard for a second with me,” and he complied, rushing forward. When Bleiz moved forward, I moved to flank the other Wolfguard. Both were forced to engage.

I used all my tricks. My blade flashed with my *alarm* spell, blinding the Wolfguard. A blade pierced my stomach. I cast a privacy bubble around us, removing all sound. The Wolfguard swung an arc, clipped my shoulder, and parried my blade. Don’t be predictable, I scolded myself.

Callem was moving between the two Wolfguard. Bleiz wrapped his up, preventing him from blocking Callem but getting a blade through the ribs instead. Callem tackled Otieno as he reached the window, forcing him down. They rolled to the edge and went over into the space between the building and the skyship. Bleiz’s Wolfguard rushed to the gap to save its master. My Wolfguard had his head removed by a limping Gareth. He never heard Gareth coming.

It was all shock as Callem and Otieno were gone. Baladon ordered the lone Wolfguard to the ship. He hesitated and then jumped onto the skyship. The skyship swung away from the building. I breathed relief—and some blood. I moved to Bleiz to remove the weapons stuck in him and stabilize him. Gareth was in shock, and I stabilized him next.

“He cannot be gone, Storme. He is going to climb up any second and tell us everything we did wrong in the fight, right?” Gareth continued staring as I used what little aether I had to prepare us for the next fight.

We had almost no time before Aelyn came charging up the stairs, “They are coming!” Gareth was downing a healing potion. His shirt and left leg were completely soaked in blood, and he looked pale. I knew his boast of saying he was playing possum was false. Aelyn merged with our group and spoke anxiously, “Over fifty Wolfguard are coming!”

Or group was heavily injured, and fifty Wolfguard swarming the room would easily overrun us. Bleiz looked at the stairs going up and pointed. It would help us from getting surrounded. We all moved to the stairs. The room suddenly exploded around us, throwing us around like rag dolls. I rolled to my knees, trying to orient myself. The skyship was firing its offensive weapons into the structure.

I was dazed but aware enough to realize Gareth was dragging Aelyn toward the stairs. Bleiz was at my side coughing blood but helping me stand. I healed his damaged lungs and got his ribs back in place. He would have to deal with his other dozen broken bones for now. Aether was low, and if you were not dying, I was not healing. Bleiz grunted in pain, “Don’t worry, their weapons will not be strong enough to destroy the black stone. It is reinforced with aetheric runes. All the old buildings are.”

Soon we were all sheltered in the stairwell. Five more blasts happened as I healed my concussion and organ damage. I pulled healing potions from my dimensional space and handed them out. I soon ran out of aether on the others. My aether regenerated at around 4 per minute, and I had consumed a healing potion earlier, so I couldn’t mix an aether restorative potion.

Aelyn slumped next to me, “The door at the top of these stairs is warded.” I stumbled up the stairs and tried to break the enchantment with my *arcane lock* spell, but it created a backlash as the spell was much stronger than a tier 1 *arcane lock* spell. The backlash gave me a major headache, and I couldn’t focus.

Soon we were all huddled around the unpassable door. Bleiz said, “When they stop firing the arcane cannons, the Wolfguard will rush us,” he said gravely.

Gareth smiled and, with gusto, said, “Then we will kill them all!”

Bleiz shook his head, “We are all injured. I suggest you all flee, and I will draw their attention and hold them,” He pointed at a small window in the stairwell. We were hundreds of feet in the air.

I pulled out the feather fall item and invisibility necklace from my storage and handed them to Aelyn. “Use these and go out the window. Link them with your aether. The necklace will make you invisible, and the earring will bring you softly to the ground.”

Aelyn looked out the window taking the items. She spun around, “Other skyships are coming! The Bricios are fleeing!” We all rushed to the window to confirm. Three Harbinger warships were incoming, and the Bricios were fleeing. The broken *Phobos,* the warship I had crushed with the *Stuffed Goose*, was also lifting off the ground. The *Stuffed Goose* slid off as the *Phobos* went into the air.

The two Bricio-controlled Harbinger warships fled. And the three Harbinger landed, Bleiz yelled, “If you are staying, then I need some help down here!” Sounds of combat erupted from the stairs as Bleiz engaged the Wolfguard. Gareth left my side to help him. If we could hold out long enough, we might survive this.

Callem patted my shoulder and went down the stairs to help. I was exhausted, and without my aether, I knew I would not be much help but would join them. “Aelyn, go out the window and tell the men we need their help up here quickly.” She looked at me momentarily before putting the items on and squeezing out the window. I waited a few moments before descending the stairs to help fend off the Wolfguard wave.

I stood behind Gareth and Bleiz and healed them when they rotated, as only two could fight abreast. I had a staff I used as a spear to help. My healing was what kept them going. But I could not replace blood loss, and then we were slowing down.

Suddenly the press of Wolfguard on the stairs ended. A voice rang up the stairs, “Storme and Gareth? I am Admiral Fystro Torrent. We must get to the Citadel immediately if you come with me immediately. It is under attack.”

We descended to the room to find Aelyn standing next to a man in a Naval uniform. The admiral didn’t wait for conversation as he started to retreat back down the tower. Dozens of dead Wolfguard littered the stairs and the room. They were all youthful in appearance, and Bleiz stopped at one to kneel. I paused to stand next to him. He looked up at me, “My sister.” His voice had pain in it. I placed my hand on his shoulder and waited for him.

When he finally stood, we raced to catch up with the group. I saw Gareth kneeling over a man outside the tower and rushed to him. It was Callem. He was on top of Otieno, with one of his heavy short swords piercing the man’s heart and the other one piercing his neck. I put my hand on Gareth’s shoulder. I do not think Gareth had cried in years, but his tears flowed now. Callem was face down, and I thought to move him off Otieno.

When I touched the old warrior, he was alive. How? I did not know. I used all eight of my remaining aether and screamed for a medic from the skyship.

Gareth joined me in calling for a medic. It still took too long. He arrived and loaded Callem onto a stretcher with two soldiers to bring him to the skyship. The Harbinger warship was named *Stella’s Rose*, on the bow. Everything was happening so fast. The two other warships had already headed to the Citadel.

As *Stella’s Rose* lifted off, I stayed with Callem and healed him as my aether became available. It was going to be a quick trip to the Citadel. Aelyn came and explained what was happening, “Admiral Fystro’s fleet was sent to the lowlands three days ago. He raced back when he discovered it was a ruse to take them away from Skyholme. His fleet first attacked the Bricio estate on the island of Metallica as all signs pointed to the Bricios waiting there for the fighting to finish. On his way to the Citadel, he noticed the Harbinger ship firing on the Black Spire and diverted three of his ships here. If he had known the Bricios were on the two escaping Harbingers, he would have pursued them, but it was too late.”

I nodded and asked, “Gareth are you going to help liberate the Citadel?”

Gareth nodded, looking at Callem’s unconscious body, “Yes, it is what Callem would have done.”

“It is not your fight Gareth,” I tried to convince him.

“Maybe not, but it feels like the right thing to fight for,” he said was a serious voice.

“Bleiz, can you do me a favor?” He didn’t move. “Protect Gareth when he goes in to fight.” A very slight nod from him confirmed he would. The ship was descending and on the rear of the Citadel. I didn’t see the black Wolfguard skyship, *Absolution*, in the sky.

“I will follow. But I will hang back and heal as my aether recovers. I should be able to drink an aether restorative potion soon,” I said after considering. Gareth looked to be in his element on the far side of the deck, mingling with the soldiers. As the men flowed off the ship, I followed at the back with Aelyn at my side.