

A Whole New World

Ser Ernard had been chatting with Sloane on and off for a while, mostly small talk to fill the silence once it started dragging on. After about an hour, Sloane noticed him staring at her wrist, “Lady Sloane, what does that signify on your watch? Is it one of those things you discussed before?”

Confused, Sloane looked down at her watch, the swirling mist under the screen was becoming a brighter shade of purple. It seemed to gravitate toward the left side. “That’s odd, I’m not sure what it’s doing, Ser Ernard.” She moved her hand around and noticed the mist kept pointing in the same direction and was getting brighter yet. “Weird. It’s pointing over there.” She moved her hand to point past him toward the woods, the mist coalescing at the front.

Ser Ernard followed her hand to where she was pointing and looked out into the woods. “I agree, that’s strange. I don’t see anything, but there is a lot of brush and trees. We’d have to go into the wooded area itself to see anything.”

Sloane kept looking at her watch and was startled when suddenly the mist formed into seven separate points along the edges. All around them and moving in the woods on either side of the wagon. “Ser Ernard, I think something is out there.”

To his credit, he didn’t hesitate to heed her warning. Ernard immediately wrapped the horses’ bridle strap to the post meant for it in between them and stood up, looking around. “Knight-Captain, be aware, something may be near us.”

Ser Gisele, who was riding ahead and to the right of the wagon turned in her saddle, “What do you see Ser Ernard? Did you hear something?”

Ser Ernard glanced back at Sloane’s watch and then looked at where the brightest point was indicated. “I’m not sure... I don’t see— “

Suddenly, an enormous wolf jumped out from the tree line and barreled into Ser Ernard, knocking him off the wagon in a massive crash of iron and flesh. Sloane immediately screamed.

Ser Gisele was a bit quicker to react, drawing her sword as she yelled out, “Knights! To arms! Beast attack!” She turned just in time to make a quick slice at another jumping wolf that was aiming for her back.

As Gisele tried to keep her target back, Ser Deryk was knocked from his mount by yet another wolf. It finally clicked for Sloane what the mist was showing her on the watch. “Ser Gisele! There are seven of them in total!”

Ser Gisele swung her sword at the wolf that was attacking her. The thing was larger than any wolf Sloane had seen or even heard about outside of movies and television. Each was about half the size of the horses. Gisele let loose a shrill whistle, yelling again, this time as loud as she could. “Ismeld! Cristole! Rally to the wagon!”

Sloane looked down at Ser Ernard who was laying on his back on the ground fighting to hold off the wolf. She noticed his face already had gashes from where it had clawed him. Making a decision, Sloane pulled the short sword out and leaped down toward Ernard, determined to help him. She put all her strength into an overhand swing, but the wolf noticed her at the last moment and tried to evade her. She still, somehow, managed to catch it in the shoulder, the sword biting down deep. The wolf loudly yelped out in pain as it jumped backward, the blade pulling out in a spray of blood as it did. Keeping her body and the sword between Ernard and the wolf, she quickly redirected her focus to Ernard, “Are you okay?! Can you stand?”

He nodded, rolling over to push himself up, “I’m fine. Thank you for the aid. Now, get behind me!” He brought his sword up and charged the wounded wolf, intent on finishing it off. The wolf held its injured leg off the ground, weakly growling as Ser Ernard rushed it. It tried to lash out one last time with a bite, but Ernard was able to dodge and then end its life with a swift slice to its neck.

Sloane looked over to where Ser Gisele was, noticing she was holding off two wolves while standing over Ser Deryk protectively. One of the wolves surged forward only to jump to the left of Gisele at the last moment and lash out at her, forcing her to turn and put her sword in between it and herself. The second she turned, the other wolf pounced onto Ser Deryk and tried to bite down on his throat. Deryk managed to dodge the wolf’s maw just in time, pulling out a dagger from behind his back and plunging it into the side of the wolf, causing it to cry out. It was then that she heard hooves rushing toward them from the front. Ser Cristole came rushing back, unstrapping the bow he had attached to his horse’s saddle. In a swift, practiced movement, he

retrieved an arrow from the other side of the saddle, nocked it to the bowstring, and drew back. He sighted in on the wolf standing over Ser Deryk and released. The arrow flew through the air and deeply embedded itself in the wolf's neck. Deryk shoved it to the side as it started to collapse, and struggled to get up. Ending one threat, Ser Cristole immediately started sighting in on another. Before he was able to do anything, however, something grabbed his attention from behind her. Sloane noticed him snapping his focus to her face in alarm, "Sloane! Look out!"

She didn't even think, she just turned and slashed out with her sword at whatever was coming from behind, feeling resistance almost immediately. Something very large and very heavy smashed into her, propelling her to the ground and knocking the breath out of her as she landed in a thud. She started kicking and punching the wolf that lay on top of her, screaming in rage the entire time. She tried stabbing at its side but wasn't able to get a good angle until suddenly, the wolf rolled off of her and Ser Gisele was there.

"It's okay Sloane, it is dead. You got it." She reached a hand out to Sloane and helped her stand up. "Are you injured?"

Sloane shook her head, breathing heavily. "No, I'm fine. I thought it was going to kill me. Shit. Is everyone okay?" Sloane looked around, noticing Sers Ernard and Deryk standing together, holding each other up. She immediately looked toward the back of the wagon, "Maud! Ser Maud is she— "

Ser Maud stepped out from the backside of the wagon with Ser Ismeld, "I'm fine Sloane, Ser Ismeld and I worked together at the back. She got there just in time to help me. You are well?" Sloane nodded and Maud nodded back. "Good, let me attend to Deryk and Ernard."

Ser Gisele looked her over, "You did well Sloane, but I think we will need to get you some armor. Your garments, while of high quality and quite durable apparently, do not seem to provide much protection."

Sloane looked down at her clothes, which to her surprise were somehow still clean and not damaged at all. "Huh, that's strange. Yeah, I guess so. I didn't think we would be attacked. Let alone by wolves that size. Why were they so large?!"

Ser Cristole looked at one of the wolves, "I have no idea. I have never seen or heard of wolves this size, especially not roaming this close to villages. They were larger and stronger than even the bears back home. After we killed five of them, the last two ran off into the woods."

Ser Gisele nodded, “We will need to inform the village, they need to be aware of the danger of these wolves. They were clearly not ordinary specimens. Hopefully, Valesbeck will have hunters who can end the threat they present.”

After that, they all dispersed to perform various tasks. Ser Ismeld and Cristole started to harvest the wolves. Meanwhile, Ser Gisele walked around checking the status of the horses and wagon, and then the two wounded knights. Ser Deryk soon came out of the back of the wagon to retrieve his horse.

Sloane walked up to the impromptu “clinic” that Ser Maud established in the back of the wagon, seeing her kneeling next to Ser Ernard and looking at the gashes on his face. “Hold still you big baby, let me get a good look at them.”

“I’m not a baby! You have a horse-sized wolf leap over a wagon, knock you to the ground, and then claw your face and see how you feel!” Ernard complained.

“They were big, but not that big. Perhaps everything just looks bigger when you’re on your back.” Maud teased him. “Now. Hold. Still.”

She gently touched his wounds, Sloane suspecting Maud wanted to see how deep they were. Suddenly, Maud gasped. Sloane started, “What? What’s wrong Maud? Is he going to be okay?”

Ernard also tensed up, “What’s wrong? What did you do?”

Sloane moved around so she could see Maud and Ernard’s faces, seeing Maud looking at her hands with wide eyes. She looked down at Ernard and saw that his wounds looked like they were starting to close. Sloane’s eyes widened, “Maud, what did you do?”

Maud just kept looking at her hands and stumbled over herself, “I... I don’t know. I just touched the wounds to try and see if I would need to stitch them. I felt a rush of something going through my hands and the wounds... they... started closing.”

Sloane’s eyes opened a bit wider at what she said. *Could it be?* “Maud, try it again. Focus on healing him.”

Maud looked at her, then back at Ernard. “Okay, I’ll try.”

Sloane got an idea as Maud placed her hands on Ernard's face, and looked at her watch. It started glowing brightly on the entire side that pointed to Maud. "Holy. Shit. It's magic." She whispered to herself. She watched as the wounds slowly started closing themselves, when they were nearly healed, she heard Maud grunt and sag. Sloane quickly reached out and grabbed hold of her, "Maud? Are you okay?"

Maud, moving sluggishly, nodded, "Yes, I just feel really tired. I don't think I can do it anymore."

Sloane tried encouraging her, "You did amazing. You performed actual magic! And my watch was able to read it happening!"

Ernard looked between the two of them as he slowly touched his face. "Ser Maud, it's a miracle, this is amazing." He reached up and gently cupped Maud's face, "Thank you, my friend. I will never forget this."

He smiled with a huge grin. "Eona be praised, Maud. This is... it's a gift from the gods. You've been blessed. The others need to know about this!"

He tilted his head toward the cot in the corner of the wagon, "Now, you rest. I feel well enough to drive the wagon."

Maud nodded, "Okay, just for a little while. Come get me when you need to switch. Okay?" Even tired, she looked determined to help.

Ernard smiled as he started to get up, "Of course. Rest our sweet healer." Letting Maud lay on the cot to sleep, Ernard and Sloane stepped out.

Sloane was flabbergasted and amazed. She witnessed actual magic. In the flesh. *Literally*. She smiled and looked down at her watch. Now knowing the purpose of the watch. Wondered if there was anything else she could use it for and what other magic could be performed. She walked back to the front of the wagon with Ernard. She sat up on the bench as he explained what happened to a stunned Gisele and others. She sat there as Ser Gisele walked to the back where Maud was.

Sloane knew what she would do now, she would learn magic. She would use her knowledge to make things that would help the Knights, and in the process, she would find Gwyn.

Sloane sat there with renewed hope and strengthened determination as the wagon and group started their journey to Valesbeck. She wouldn't stop thinking of all the ramifications and possibilities of magic until she heard Ser Gisele call out. She looked up and noticed Valesbeck ahead. Past the fields of produce, wheat, and corn, a small village sat under the setting sun. Still alive despite the late hour with a swarm of activity working on an under-construction palisade that was being hastily raised. Bonfires dazzled where they were placed all around the perimeter of the village proper.