Chapter 82 (Arc 2 Chapter 36)

The week dragged on for Gareth, who was excited to get to the capital and get a new outfit for the *Sowing Festival*. I think he was using the communication stone to talk with Loriel every night. I thought about taking the stone and storing it in my dimensional storage, but I thought he needed to make his own mistakes. I would pick up the pieces when everything fell apart.

During spell class on the sixth day, I managed to imprint the *tissue extraction* spell. It was quicker than I expected, and that was entirely due to Selina’s help. She helped me by showing me how to use already imprinted spells to expedite the process. The more spells in a particular sphere you had on your aether matrix, the easier it was to imprint spells from that sphere.

So I was gaining a boost from my skill affinity from healing magic and the five prior healing spells I had learned. For the first evolution of my new spell, I selected organ removal. This allowed me to select one organ and cut all tissue connecting it to the body. This would allow me to harvest the glands from the queen bees in the Frost Vault.

The spell would work on living creatures and dead ones, but like the cleanliness spell, I would need multiple evolutions to overcome a person’s innate defenses. A person could also allow the caster to work on their body like Antal used his bone-shaping ability of people. I could spend five evolutions just to be able to kill someone by touching them, but I was more focused on the spell evolutions to help with dungeon harvests. It would be a nightmare to fight a mage and then have all your arteries and veins to your heart instantly cut. You would either need to drink a healing potion instantly or cast healing magic on yourself.

With my latest spell imprinted, I needed to select my next spell. I closed my eyes and scanned the shelves in my dimensional closet for the *absolute time* spell. I was about to extract from the space when I looked at the *lightning spear* book on the same shelf. I have imprinted a large number of defensive spells and spells that helped in melee combat. I didn’t have any ranged spells in my repertoire yet. Now that I was in a dungeon, I could freely practice flashy ranged magic and not draw attention to myself. My team would keep my abilities secret, so maybe I should learn an offensive ranged spell next. It would also be easy to quickly level it up in the dungeon.

*Lightning spear* was a tier 2 spell in the lightning sphere. I pulled the book out and examined the description. The spear started four feet long and was just an inch in diameter. It had a range of fifty feet; if it didn’t hit anything, it would dissipate. One thing I did not like about the spell was the speed of the spear started at just 75 mph, which was half as fast as an arrow from a recurve bow.

The damage from the spear was energy-based, similar to a laser. There were evolutions to add an electrical discharge to the spear that could overload a target’s nervous system and possibly paralyze them briefly. The notes from the prior owner of this spell book were not overly optimistic about its power. Then again, he only had achieved four evolutions by his notes in the margins. The prior owner also appeared to have a terrible time hitting his intended target—so you needed to be able to aim as well.

The other offensive spellbook I had was *lightning sphere*. That was essentially a grenade that you summoned and physically threw. It was an area-of-effect spell but was limited by how far you could throw it. I could also learn the ice ball spell from the spell book we just received as a dungeon reward, but the lightning sphere was a tier 2 spell, and I had the lightning affinity, so I would only need to utilize one slot on my aether matrix to learn it.

Selina approached me, looked at the spell book, and nodded, “A good choice Storme. Two evolutions and the spear will achieve excellent speed, making it hard to block.” She continued over the Mera to help her and her sister. With Selina’s affirmation, I opened the spell book and started the imprinting process for the *lightning spear*.

At dinner that evening, Gareth tried to rush me to finish eating quickly so we could go to Solaris city, catch a skyship to the capital island, and purchase new clothes for the *Sowing Festival Gala*. Irritated with his child-like probing, and since Mera and Fera were seated across from me, I asked Gareth if he was just eager to see Nina again. He quickly calmed down as Fera glowered at him.

I talked with Mia while I ate slowly as she was finalizing the transition of the guards at the Shiny Platinum. Removing the Miaden guards was a priority before I began my construction of the skyship. When I finally stood, Gareth also jumped to his feet, and we left for the mile-long walk to the city.

Gareth put his arm around me, “Stormy, that was just mean. Fera was just starting to talk to me again.”

I looked at my friend and asked, “So you were not planning to spend time with Nina at the *Gentle Tauren*?”

Gareth stumbled a bit, “Well…you know…I gave her two gold last time I was there, and she said she hoped to see me again.”

I laughed, “Gareth, did you think that maybe you overpaid? I am guessing she makes maybe twenty gold a year. Are you going to pay her two gold every time we stay at the *Gentle Taruen*? If that is your plan, then I expect she will be ecstatic every time we show up.”

Gareth took his arm off my shoulder, and we walked in silence for a while. When the outer gates were close, he said, “Can I borrow two gold?” I just shook my head and didn’t respond.

When we landed in the capital we went straight to see Danlius, the master tailor. He was probably the most expensive tailor in the upper capital, but Gareth trusted his opinion. The last time we were in the capital, Gareth had spent his entire savings on clothes. I had just gotten some underclothes. Danlius smiled as we entered, “Gaston! You have returned! What can I help you with today?”

I moved forward, not planning to let Gareth do the talking. “Danlius, we need current fashion for attending a formal dinner with a succession member of the Triumvirate.” The man’s eyes sparkled.

He spoke softly and leaned in, “Who are we trying to impress?”

I was not about to contribute to the gossip wheel in the capital. “Gaston, is trying to impress the daughter of someone we do not wish to disclose. I am going for moral support.”

Danlius nodded, but I could tell he wanted to dig but held his tongue, “Very good. Will there be dancing?” The man was clever. If I said yes, then it would mean we were going to more than a dinner.

“Maybe after the meal. It depends on the host,” I deflected.

At least Gareth had been silent and let me do the talking. Another attendant joined us as we were brought to the back room, and an ensemble was assembled on both of us. I declined to get any enchantments on the clothes. Gareth was still growing taller and wider. I was close to my expected height but was still filling out.

I knew I was close to my last growth spurt as the aether burn from my core was lessoning. According to Selina, it would become very mild when my body finished growing and then would go away completely in a few years. When I couldn’t recognize the burn any longer, my aether core would be fully mature and barely expand its capacity further. I was extremely diligent in my exercises to make sure I ended up with as large an aether pool as possible.

The fitting took over an hour. Gareth was extremely finicky and wanted brighter colors while I preferred the more neutral and bland colors. He ended up with a primary lavender and olive green outfit. My outfit was dark gray, white, and black. We received separate invoices and were told our clothes would be ready in the morning.

I reviewed my invoice.

Black Trap Door Spider Silk Socks x 1 10 gold

Black Acid Drake Leather Boots x 1 50 gold

Dark Gray Wool Pants x 1 5 gold

Black Fine Leather Belt w/Scabbard Hook x18 gold

White Trap Door Spider Shirt Shirt x 1 15 gold

Black Giant Silk Worm Vest x 1 6 gold

Dark Gray Wool Coat x 1 8 gold

Total Invoice……………………………….92 gold

With the exception of the boots, I had been fairly thrifty in my selections. Gareth was still staring at his invoice, and I was just waiting for him to ask me to pay for it. I handed Danlius ten large gold and soon got my chance. Gareth finally spoke up, “Stormy, I mean Skye. Can you help me out a little?” I leaned over and looked at his total. Even without enchantments, it was 162 gold.

“How much did she give you to bring her?” I asked, holding back a laugh.

Gareth gave me an unamused look, “Thirty gold.”

“Wow, my date offered me 50 gold to bring her! It is actually costing you 132 gold to take your take. I hope the food is really good!” I joked at my friend’s expense. I caved and said, “Put all your coin out, and I will make up the difference.” He brightened a little and pulled out three large gold coins and seven regular gold. I placed 125 gold on the counter, obfuscating I was removing it from my storage.

When we got to the *Gentle Tauren,* Broderick yelled, “Gaston and Skye! Will you be staying the evening?” I moved to the bar, and he nodded when I motioned to the room. The loud announcement of our entering was for Nina’s benefit as she scrambled down the stairs. I started using my cleanliness spell around the first floor, and I sat at the bar when I finished.

Broderick placed two keys on the counter and kept two hands over them for a second, “Can you do both of the rooms as well?” I pretended to give it some thought.

“I will do my room and another room of your choice,” I said, thumbing Gareth and Nina huddled in a corner. “Gareth can scrub his own room if you need it cleaned too,” I said with a grin.

“Nina, two ales and two burgers for our guests,” he bellowed to the young woman. He returned to our conversation, “You can clean these two rooms then. I admit I gave them to you because they most need a mage’s cleaning.” He placed a third key on the counter, “This room is not as nice as the others.” I took that third key and tossed it to Gareth, waiting for Nina to return from the kitchen.

Curious, I used my *assess person* ability on Broderick.

Broderick Gray

Human Male, Dragon-Blooded

Age 36

Disposition Friendly

Broderick’s face soured immediately, “You shouldn’t go using your magic on people without asking, Skye. That felt like a reading.”

Completely embarrassed, I responded, “Sorry, I didn’t realize people could sense it when I used it.”

Broderick took a minute before he smiled again, “I am not like most people.” He paused, “I have an aether sense ability that tingles when people use magic on me. Yours was very faint, so I assume it was a weak reading ability. Well, tell me what it said.”

“It is just a tier 1 *assess person* ability. Your name is Broderick Gray. Human Male, Dragon-Blooded. Age 47. With a disposition of friendly,” I relayed to the innkeeper.

“Well, don’t expect it to say friendly if you read me again,” But he slapped my shoulder and grinned. “I am kidding with you. But I am not as forgiving as most. You are young and made a mistake.” He sighed, “The Dragon-Blood is from my father. He obtained it from a dungeon essence and passed it down to me.”

I was not aware of an ability called dragon-blood. As I was considering asking Broderick more, he explained, “It is a trait. It allows me to heal faster, and my bones are almost unbreakable. It made being a front liner on my dungeon crew more bearable.”

I nodded, “Thank you for telling me. You didn’t have to.”

He laughed, “If I didn’t, you seemed the type who would spend hours in the academy library trying to find the answer.”

My food and ale were brought to me by Nina, and I toasted Broderick, who left to tend to other customers. I surmised traits were genetically linked. So Broderick’s father must have incorporated dragon genetics into himself from the dungeon essence.

When I finished eating, I went up to the rooms. They were both on the fourth floor, the top floor of the inn. These must have been the nicest two rooms the inn had to offer. The furnishings were finer, and the rooms were larger, with a large sitting room each. I cleaned both rooms thoroughly with my spell and then returned one of the keys. I kept the room with the balcony overlooking the square, and people watched into the evening before setting *alarms, arcane locks, and privacy* spells.

I was in the common room eating breakfast at the bar when Gareth came down and sat with me. Broderick gave him teas and a plate of fried eggs. I asked my friend, “How was your evening?”

“Good, Stormy.” He started eating and talking between mouthfuls, “Nina is really great to talk to.” He leaned in, “Two large silvers, in case you were wondering. I definitely overkilled it with two gold last time.” He swallowed his mug of tea and asked, “Do we have time to make it to Aegis City for the dungeon run?”

I shrugged, “Not sure. If the clothes are ready, maybe.” Gareth started dragging me out. At least I had finished my breakfast.

Our clothes were ready and packaged. I put mine into my dimensional space, and Gareth whined a bit when I made him carry his. I realized he was getting a little spoiled.

While Gareth talked to a young woman, I worked on my lightning spear spell on the skyship trip. He definitely made some progress by the time we landed, as he knew her name and that she worked as a sorter in a wool factory. He even drove to impress her by saying he rented an apartment in the large building with the hydra being painted on it. Tatem had added the sketches of the adventurers to go with the hydra, which was outlined and had some shading. No color had yet been added to the mural.

We found the entire team in the bakery, waiting to see if Gareth and I would make it. We had over two hours before we needed to make it to the dungeon, so Remy asked to talk with me. He was sitting across from me in a private booth and said, “Yes.”

He then produced the manual to build the *Wind Splitter* and repeated, “Yes.”

“Excellent! You can take a stipend to travel to the trader shipyards to get a better handle on the process. I hope to start construction next year, but I want to start stockpiling materials now.” Remy looked as excited as I felt. We spent an hour talking about personnel and materials. Sensing our conversation would not end soon, Gimble slid into a seat next to Remy.

“Storme, are you coming with us today?” Gimble asked.

“Yes, Gimble. I learned a new spell to harvest the bee queen glands,” I said neutrally. Gimble’s eyes went up in mild surprise.

Gimble asked, “Do you want us to tackle the hobgoblin again? Ullmark found out the dungeon team before us was hired by the Miadens in the capital. They are seeding the Frost Vault with unique dungeon prizes from the lowlands in hopes of getting it to become more profitable. The guild master was furious they hadn’t informed him of their intentions.”

“How is it possible that they did it without telling him?” I asked, trying to figure out the politics.

“The adventurer’s guild is a Sphere wide organization, but the Miaden family oversees the dungeons on the Skyholme islands. There is some competition between them,” Gimble explained. “The Miaden family controls and taxes the dungeons. The adventurer’s guild creates the delvers’ guide and polices the delvers. It is a terrible system, but in my time here, I know Skyholme couldn’t exist without the resources that they pull from the dungeons.”

“So we are safe to explore the second level of the Frost Vault?” I asked after considering.

Gimble nodded, “We can try some of the boars in the maze. I don’t think we should try to tackle the hobgoblin rider to reach the third level.”

“Ok, you can assemble the team. I am going to talk with Remy for a few more minutes,” I said while Gimble left.

Remy gave me an update on the Shiny Platinum. Revenues were down slightly but seemed stable. We had lost two cooks but hired three. None of the servers or dishwashers had left. He also mentioned that he had purchased a large amount of bronze for me, and the ingots were stored in the warehouse. I had forgotten that I planned to make some bronze miniatures of the monsters in the paintings for display and sale.

I went and grabbed the bronze into my dimensional space and joined Gimble, Ullmark, Sammie, Gareth, and Aelyn to head to the dungeon. Talia was here but wanted to study a spell, and Lana still had not imprinted the *dimensional closet* spell.

I walked with Aelyn, and we talked about how she was doing. Aelyn was surprisingly upbeat, and she even smiled a bit. When we arrived at the dungeon arch, Ullmark talked to the guards and nodded everything was ok. We turned in our token and entered at our assigned time.