Chapter 109

I was not looking forward to confronting Gareth.  We had been on opposing schedules, and I think Gareth had been sleeping at the academy most nights.  I posted the crew for the mission to Llorth two days ago in the training room.  I was only taking Cilia, Bleiz, Leda, Remy, and Sammie.   It was just a trade mission, and I did not foresee combat.  I asked Talia once she got one of the communication stones, number eight of the set of nine, and she declined. She was too busy with the new academy year and Selina was teaching her privately as well.

Gareth was standing, geared, and confused at the ramp to the cargo hold.  “Storme, what is up?  Why am I not going?”

“I posted the crew for the mission in the training room,”  I replied, putting down the cats to hunt rats.

“It is fine.  I want to go, so I will just….” Gareth started to turn.

“No, Gareth.  You were scheduled by Ullmark for the delve on the seventh day.  You have withdrawn advanced pay amounting to ten gold but have not delved in a month.  You need to work with Ullmark to help train the delve teams,” I said, trying to talk without any anger in my voice.  Thankfully Bleiz walked up the ramp, and everyone else was on board.  If things got messy, I did not want them to see it.

Gareth looked conflicted. I added, “I talked with Namira this afternoon.  She told me you are telling people at the academy that we are partners for the delve team and that you are going to get her in on a delve.”

Gareth looked uncomfortable, his adult body showing childlike guilt, “I was going to tell you about that.  We barely see each other anymore and did not have a chance.”

Gareth was searching for what to say, so I added, “I heard about you fighting in the taverns. Am I assuming you are spending nights at the academy to be with a new fling? Have you told Fera anything? Is Namira the only person you told you have your own delve team at the academy?” Each statement and question was a shot to Gareth.

Silence rained for a while between us. I eventually walked past him, saying, “Do better, Gareth. I know you can.” I let out a low to high pitch whistle, and the two displacer beasts came running up the ramp. Kiara held a rat proudly in her jaws while Adrial tried to steal it from her. I activated the winch to raise the cargo ramp, leaving Gareth to think about his decisions.

I signaled for Cilia and Leda to lift off while I reviewed the cargo with Remy. “You should really hire a merchant if you plan to trade. I did some research, and it has more than just looking at the margins. Well, anyway, I loaded one cask of the frost mead, and purchased seven hundred linen towels made from the giant plants in the dungeon on Greatwood Island.” He walked among the crates. The cargo hold was barely full. “These crates over here have a few blocks of blood marble from the dungeon in the capital. I think it is unique to the dungeon and maybe a sculpture might want to use it. Or some rich person wants an interesting floor.”

I opened the crate to find an off-white block of marble with rich red veins running through it. It actually looked pretty morbid. Remy added, “The blocks have a slight aether signature life and stone. It feels like the stones are actually bleeding if you look at them long enough. Not something I would want to look at every day.” He shuddered, and I agreed. The two heavy stones took up most of the weight I had consigned him to fill the cargo hold with.

“Good job, Remy. You never know what people want. Maybe they will be a hit. How much did everything cost?” I asked as we walked up the stairs toward the bridge.

“There was a warehouse of the marble in the capital. They were selling the two-foot cube stones for 2 gold with transportation included. The towels were a silver each as they had a surplus on hand. Normally they would be about one and a half silver in bulk. The cask of frost mead was made by Mera from our honey harvests,” Remy reported.

“Excellent work, Remy. You can see if you can find a merchant to hire. I will handle the sale myself. How many of the stones did they have in storage?” I asked, pausing at my cabin door.

Remy paused and thought, “Six hundred and fourteen. I think they were being held for a Bircio project that never materialized. Took them a well to haul all those stones out from a lower level of the dungeon—or so I was told.”

“Buy it all when we get back. We have plenty of space to store them in the warehouse portion of the Shiny Platinum. As you said, if they are unique, then someone will want them.” I produced two large platinum and handed them to Remy.

“This is 2,000 gold. Do you want anything else?” Remy asked.

“No, use the leftover funds on your one-person skyship project,” I said, smiling. He smiled back and pocketed the coin.

I entered my cabin and fed the two cats as promised before falling down on my bed. It was a long trip to Llorth, but I had a lot to do. I pulled out my invisibility spellbook and got to work. Four hours later, the spell was finally imprinted. It had taken much longer than it should have, but I could finally turn myself invisible. The first evolution was to include my clothes in the invisibility.

The spell was called personal invisibility, and I had used a dungeon copy of the spellbook, which meant it disintegrated as I learned it. I purchased another copy of the same spell that detailed evolutions common to the spell. The second evolution was available after ten minutes of using the spell, and I formed it to include my weapons. Although the invisibility reached my clothes, it did not work more than six inches from my person. With this evolution, I could now draw a weapon that extended up to three feet from my person and would be concealed.

Adrial had noticed I was gone and hissed and scratched at the door to get out of the room. Kiara looked panicked for a moment but then jumped on the bed and found my invisible body. She clawed my chest, confirming it was me. Then she circled once and curled into a ball. She watched her sister at the door in what I assumed was amusement.

I dropped the illusion and went to the bridge. It was about time to give Leda and Cilia a rest. I knocked on Remy’s door as I passed as he was supposed to be on watch with me. Cilia and Leda left the bridge. I sat in the captain’s chair, and the two cats went to the forward viewing window.

It was similar to the glass windows in my apartment. It was magically hardened glass, ten feet wide and six feet high, giving us a panoramic view of the direction we were traveling in. It was also enchanted to be viewable in one direction. The cats were fascinated as the land raced between us. We were a few thousand feet in the air, well away from most organic threats.

Remy took his seat in the navigator’s chair to watch the magical radar for threats. Remy noted, “You trained them quickly. They are growing fairly quickly as well.”

“According to the book, they are actually smaller than they should be, but that may be because they are both females. I am working on collars for them that should prevent them from attacking me in my sleep. I just have alarm spells to wake me if they attack me,” I said casually. Remy paled slightly.

“You mean you sleep while they are out of their cages?” He sounded perplexed by my statement. They had sharp teeth, and the barbs on their tentacles were meant to restrain prey.

“Yes, they have already imprinted on me according to the book, so I am past the stage to worry about it. But I still take precautions by setting my alarm spells,” I said confidently.

“Gareth said their parents got to be the size of a horse,” Remy seemed a little fearful.

“True, they do, but the training manual said they were also extremely loyal pets if raised and trained properly,” I said casually. Remy did not seem convinced.

“Maybe he is a dog person,” Bleiz commented, appearing in the back of the bridge.

I laughed, and the conversation turned to Remy’s one-person skyship. Bleiz was more interested than me as Rempy eagerly described the controls and top speed of 440 miles per hour with the right aether crystal power source. He was definitely saying it for me to overhear but the more coin I had, the less I had to spend.

I interrupted, “Remy, I am going to task you with going to price out tier six crystals with 500 units in Hakeam. I assume they have a strong communication stone to reach the city somewhere. I will take set crystal but need them tier six for the improved recharge rate.”

Remy took out a notebook and did some math, “Three hundred to four hundred thousand depending on the market. Do you really have the funds on hand, or am I just checking?”

“We will see how this trade mission goes to calculate when was can make the trip to purchase it,” I informed Remy who was excited at the prospect. The conversation returned to Remy’s project and Cila and Leda returned to the bridge an hour before landing. I remained and had Leda tutor me in the procedures for landing. Recognizing the landmarks and the acceptable approach to the city.

When we landed, I paid the port fee. Sammie was going to remain on board with the cats. Leda and Cilia were off shopping. Remy was on his own, and Bleiz was with me. “Where are we off to?” Bleiz said in a cheerful tone—well, cheerful for him.

We went to the adventurer’s guild bazaar, found Lorlae, and asked her to be our guide again. She jumped at the chance to bring us through the city and get out of the shop.

“I am going to visit a tamer first to get collars for the cats. I have not found the enchantments I wanted, so I can buy the collars and study the enchantments to make my own collars,” I informed her. Finding our way to a tamer in the lower city took an hour of winding our way through the streets. Lorlae was looking for a specific tamer who specialized in large cats. When we found him, I noted he was a dwarf and had his two wives working with him.

“Name is Bart,” he introduced himself. You looking to buy a large cat or horse?” he asked. Those were his specialties and why Lorlae had brought us to his establishment.

“No, I have begun training myself a pair of displacer beasts. Just kittens currently, but I wanted to get them collars,” I informed the tamer-merchant whose bushy eyebrows went, and then he smiled.

“If they are less than five weeks, I will take ‘em off your hands for four thousand. Or I will train ‘em for you for a thousand,” He offered immediately.

“Not for sale,” I said immediately.

He chuckled, “Already attached, are we? Well, is it the standard breed? And sex?”

“Yes, regular breed and both females,” I responded.

“Good, should be easy enough if you got them young. I have a few things you may be interested in. Standard binding collar for preventing them from attacking you. A return collar will call them to you. An anti-heat collar prevents them from going into heat by stalling their breeding cycle, but you won’t need that until they are two years old. If you want something else, I can get you a discount at a master artificer I work with,” he said.

“Can I see one of each?” I asked, and he retrieved four large buckles that looked like they went on a leather belt. For the small cats, they were going to be large. The binding buckle was 250 gold, and the return collar was 100 gold, but it did not always work as intended. The animal needed to know where you were for the summon to work, so it might wander aimlessly trying to find you. The anti-heat collar was the most expensive at 500 gold. It could work on humans as well as animals to prevent normal reproductive cycles.

“I will have one of each and three pairs of collars that go with them for their growth sizes,” I announced, paying 923 gold for the lot. The leather collars were laced with the aether-infused wire attached to the buckle, so they were not just regular collars.

After paying, Lorae commented, “Can I see the cats again?”

“Maybe after we visit the Mage Academy in the city. Is your father going to pay us another visit if you come to my ship?” I asked with a grin.

“No, we worked things out. Besides, I think two of my father’s guildmates are tailing me right now,” he giggled.

Bleiz went on alert and scanned the streets but came up empty. Lorae smirked as Bleiz searched. She pointed out one, “That woman shopping in the street—selecting produce. That is an illusionist.” As soon as she pointed at the woman, the woman waved back and went back to shopping. “The other one—she looked around in the street. I do not see him, but he definitely left the bazaar following us. Probably on a roof, invisible.”

It made me and Bleiz uncomfortable knowing we had tailed without realizing it. I had been on the lookout, and Bleiz was even better than me at spotting inconsistencies. We started following Lorlae to the library, and I said, “Maybe I should leave you here to get some training Bleiz.”

Beliz had an annoyed look, but Lorlae said, “Jasper is one of the best dungeon scouts in the city, and Marigold is a powerful illusionist. You shouldn’t have noticed them. Jasper may be interested in training you.”

“Maybe,” A dark elf was suddenly walking next to Lorae. He had not even been invisible. It was a misdirection type of magic that affected the minds of people passively. I had done some research on the magic and was astonished at how well it actually worked.

Bleiz was tense as Lorlae introduced the dark elf, “This is Jasper, my bodyguard for most days of the week—at least when he is not delving.”

Bleiz asked, “Is guarding your charge difficult?”

Jasper chuckled, “Lorae definitely keeps things interesting. Two days ago…”

Lorae cut him off abruptly, “The library is that domed building over there. I will take Bleiz and Jasper to lunch so they can talk.” I had a weird thought that maybe Lorae was attracted to Bleiz—or maybe just curious about him.

“Sounds fine. You can bring her to the Maelstrom to see the kittens,” a spun around, looking at the buildings. “The Maelstrom is that way?” I asked, pointing. Lorlae nodded, and I walked toward the library, ignoring Bleiz’s objections.

When I got to the library entrance, I annoying had to purchase a membership for a large gold. And that membership only allowed me to wander the first floor. The spell archives were on a much higher floor. I went to the archive desk, “Good evening. I wish to purchase a spell. The tier five lighting elemental spell.”

The dark elf woman behind the desk looked me over and called in her supervisor. A much older-looking male elf. A was brought to a private room and sat down in a comfortable chair, “Welcome!” He said, “Can I get you anything to eat or drink?”

“No, I am just here for the spell. Is it still available?” I asked. It was available a week ago, but maybe someone purchased it since then.

“He clasped his hands. We have had a mage place a deposit on the spell. In order for you to purchase the spell, you need to pay him twice the amount of the deposit,” he said with some angst. “It is policy,” he added. I could tell he was uncomfortable.

“How much was the deposit?” I asked, starting to suspect I was being conned.

He got fidgety, “I can not reveal the mage who made the deposit, but I suggest you consider how badly you the spell. She is—well—she is a person of importance.”

I knew it was a dungeon copy of the spell, so only one person could learn it before the book crumbled. “How often do you get a copy of this spell?”

“Not often. It is the first one in quite some time,” he said conciliatory.

“Can you contact the person? Can I meet her? I really would like to purchase this rare spell, and I have the,” I did the math, “thirty-two thousand gold.” That was 24,000 for the spell and 8,000 for the mystery shopper.

“I will call the Archmage in charge of the library. He is the only one who would be willing to talk with her,” his tone sounded a bit ominous, and I considered dropping my request. Instead, I was made to wait three hours before he returned with an ancient-looking elf with lighter skin. He bowed and introduced the man, “Archmage Armellian Tether. I will leave you two to discuss arrangements.” He left quickly, not wishing to be involved further.

The Archmage sat and produced a bottle and two glasses from thin air. He poured one and handed it to me, and I sipped the wine, a strong taste of cherries coated my taste buds. He poured himself a glass and sipped. “You have placed me in a predicament, stranger. I have set the laws of the library and followed them to the letter for twelve hundred years. Normally someone of renown who wishes to purchase a spell pays for it completely and does not resort to having the spell held in reserve.”

“I can drop my request,” I replied, not wanting to anger whoever the unknown woman was.

“No, no. I have talked with her. The spell is yours if you wish it,” He pursed his lips, “She wants an additional eight thousand gold for it.” This definitely felt like a shakedown.

I nodded, unconcerned, as I weighed the value of the spell in my mind. Forty thousand gold was about 35 days’ worth of platinum coins—if all I did was make platinum coins. It was going to take me months to learn a tier-five spell, so I would not get a benefit for quite some time.

My research on the spell indicated it was extremely powerful. The lightning elemental was immune to normal weapons and attacked with impressive speed. I had not found too many evolutions in the research, but there was a lightning armor evolution in a tale where the elemental could wrap the mage in a protective shield. So the spell was both offensive and defensive. I nodded to the Archmage and produced forty large platinum coins from my dimensional space.

Armellian nodded, “I apologize for breaking my own rules. The next time you wish to purchase one of our spells, I will give you a sizable discount. Or, if you wish, I would give you any tier three spell in the library.” I laughed to myself. A tier three spell would cost, at most, 1000 gold. I had just been fleeced for eight thousand gold.

I stood and shook his hand, “Thank you. I will look at your registry of tier-three spells, but most likely, I am just taking the lightning elemental spell and leaving.” The Archmage took me to the same middle-aged elf and told him to bring me the lightning elemental spell and add any tier-three spell on top of it.

I waited a half hour for the spell book while I paged through a tier-three spell registry. The lightning elemental spellbook had crackling blue energy constantly passing through the blue-steel binding. It did not shock me when I picked it up. It was a neat aesthetic, and I sent the book to my storage.

I paged through the spells finding a number that interested me. I asked a passing librarian if this was the only tier-three spell registry and was told no. There was the auction house registry as well. I asked for that book as he did say any tier three spell in the library.

The leather-bound auction book had the date of the upcoming auction. It listed everything that was available for the auction, including the special auction for dungeon essences. Even as I was reading the leather-bound book, more entries were added. The librarian said there was a single master auction registry and a dozen copies that were updated from the master in real-time.

Each item noted a time when the auction would start and a minimum bid. I paged to the aether crystals. A tier five, 300-unit aether crystal was the largest crystal listed. The opening bid was 30,000 gold. That would have been a good price, but it would likely go much higher. I moved to the spells. There were seventeen tier 1 spells, all extremely rare dungeon spells. Almost forty tier-two spells, including two copies of the aether shield spell. The minimum bid was 1000 gold for each spell.

I turned the page to tier-three spells, and just eleven were listed. There were no healing or lightning spells were listed. A perfect invisibility spell was listed, but I had just added personal invisibility. Perfect invisibility was the enchantment on Bleiz’s necklace. Three fire spells, a water spell, an earth spell, and an aetheric spell called spirit sentinel. I stopped there as I was unfamiliar with the spell. I went to the shelves and found a reference for aetheric spells. Spirit sentinel was an intangible manifestation of a facet of the mage. When borne, it lasted a day. It was an intelligent guardian with minimal force magic to carry things.

As a read, it appeared to be more of a phantasmal servant than anything else. It took a large number of evolutions to make it substantial enough to cause damage in combat. The book noted it was the perfect assistant for an alchemist or researcher since it was mentally linked to the mage that cast it. It would cost me four points on my spell matrix to imprint, but it sounded like a fascinating spell.

I found the librarian the Archmage had talked to and requested the spell, which had an opening bid of 2,500 gold. He was caught off guard and left to talk with the Archmage again. Obviously, the Archmage had not intended to include the spells in the auction. I waited an hour, and he surprisingly returned with the spell book. “The Archmage thanks you for your patronage and will handle the auction house in regards to the spell.”

I had expected more resistance to acquiring the spell or just being told outright that it was unavailable. I moved the book to my dimensional space and went to return to the Maelstrom. I would rest up before trying my hand at being a merchant.