Chapter 56 (Arc 2 Chapter 10) Lightning Reflexes

The week was miserable for everyone.  Cold heavy rain fell non-stop from the 2nd to 5th day.  Having so many days of continuous rain on the floating island was more than unusual and none of the instructors could remember it raining for so long before.  That didn’t stop the instructors from continuing to hold classes outside.  I also got a workout using my cleanliness spell to clear areas of flooding in the barracks as the leaks were being repaired.  Callem even left for a day to make sure his farm didn’t have much flooding.  He did lose his current tobacco crop but there was no damage or flooding to the buildings.

I decided that I needed some type of warmth spell.  Shivering in the rain and then coming inside the barracks after a session… it seemed to take forever to get warm again.  I felt sorry for everyone else who couldn’t dry their clothes at will.

Drying piles of wet clothes became a task I did with regularity during the week since I felt sorry for everyone.  It took more aether than normal but my *cleanliness* spell did accomplish the task.  It was just another notch in my favored status among the other students. I think Pascal was gaining favor just for the fact that he was my brother.

Although the twins were talking to Gareth again they were still hanging on me.  I was developing a solid friendship with Mia as well.  The enchanting class had us working together and when I completed my first touch light globe she took it to her room to use.  My second touch light globe was shipped to the capital for sale on the fourth day.  Instructor Aldon Aethon said it sold immediately for 50 gold.  I was surprised they had placed it for so much but it was a new novelty for the rich.  The light cost less than 3 gold to manufacture and only 20 minutes of my time if I used my metal shaping skill.  Most of the cost of the light was in the small tier 4 aether charging crystal in its base.  If I didn’t have my metal shaping ability I probably wouldn’t have been able to make the runes by hand.  Even master Aethon said the runes would take him over two days to draw out with a stylus.

Instructor Aethon said it was a novelty item to show at parties.  After a few dozen units were sold the price would drop quickly.  My idea would also be copied by the other two enchanting shops in the city in short order.  I think instructor Aethon was also getting wise to my metal shaping skill.  I had done my best to hide my metal shaping skill but my lack of patience in manipulating wire by hand with the stylus had led me to take shortcuts.  To his credit, he never asked about my advanced wire manipulations, just complimented me on the final product.

I added six more lights for him to sell during the week, one of them coated in a blue epoxy resin.   Aldon was flying to the capital on the 7th day and would put them up for sale in the Aethon family shop.  He also gave me 44 gold for my first light globe.  That was what remained after taxes and transportation costs and a small fee for selling it in his family shops.  The short burst of revenue from the lights would be an additional cover for my spending in my renovation of the warehouse.

On 7th day the twins wanted to go into the city with me.  I was still sour on the city of Solaris from my prior visits.  I also had private lessons from Selina and planned to meet with Isla to see her progress on her plans for the warehouse.  I handed the twins a stack of silver coins from my storage space.  I had gotten used to reaching into my pocket and producing coins from my dimensional closet but their eyes bugged when I handed them a fistful of coins containing 20 silver and two large silver.  They both stared at the pocket the coins had come from.  Note to self: only pull objects from items if it was feasible to believe they could have been in there in the first place.

“Storme we can’t accept this!  This is…and you are not even planning to go with us to the city!” Fera exclaimed.

I waved them off.  “Don’t worry,” I said having failed to consider how much 40 silver was to the twins.  “Just consider it an advance on your services.  You are still interested in going to an academy in Aegis city and working for me.”  Mera jumped and hugged me.  Had I just moved into the role of sugar daddy for the twins?

As they were leaving I heard them discussing how much to give to their parents and how much to spend on themselves in the city.  The twins were really good people.

Gareth had already left to god knows where.  I assumed he was meeting Brianne somewhere.  That left me alone with a few hours to kill before I met with Selina at her apartment overlooking the square in Jen’s Hollow.  I raided the larder and made some spicy pork meat buns.  The bread was a little too crusty but other than that they were good.

I made 24 of the buns and my fellow students who hadn’t left for the day came and partook in my culinary efforts, finishing off all of them except the two I reserved.  One for Selina and the other for Isla went into my dimensional storage.

I knocked on Selina’s door and when it opened a young woman was on the other side causing me to pause. Selina called from inside the room, “Storme that is my great-great-granddaughter, Talia.  She is going to join us for your session today.” I stepped into the room and it was clear by the dress and perfume Talia had on that she was here as a setup.  It wasn’t that she wasn’t beautiful but I didn’t like being ambushed by Selina.

Not wanting to anger Selina I behaved myself during the lesson.  Talia was in her fourth year at the Mage Academy in the capital.  She was talented as mages go for her age.  What irked me the most about this ambush was that Selina wasn’t going to help me with imprinting my lightning reflexes spell today.  Talia was here to help me with magical defenses.

The lesson focused on aether sensing.  Picking up the feeling of aether being gathered in a person about to cast a spell.  It was definitely a very useful session but something that Selina could have taught me without using Talia as a foil.  When her granddaughter left in the evening I produced the still-warm meat bun from my space. Selina started eating and talked, “So what do you think of Talia?  She is pretty and talented.  She didn’t brag but she is ranked 5th in her class at the mage academy.”

I tried to figure out what to say to not upset Selina. “I don’t think I am ready for any type of relationship,” I started carefully.  Selina chuckled.

“While I hoped you might be interested in her but I also thought she might be a good fit for your dungeon delving team.   Of the nineteen great-great-grandchildren I have she is the only one I revealed myself to.  She is smart…smarter than she came off today since she was ogling your body,” my eyes opened wide. “You didn’t notice?” Selina chuckled again.  “Storme for being so wise for your age you certainly fail to see a lot of what is right in front of you!”

“I am sorry but did Callem tell you about my plans?” I asked while my face flushed in embarrassment.  Maybe there was a spell I could learn that would tell me exactly what women were thinking.  Or Aelyn could just read their minds and tell me.

Selina scrunched her middle-aged face, “Was that a secret?  Callem told all the instructors of your purchase in Aegis city and asked us to be on the lookout for potential members of a delve team.  I met Talia last weekend and she is training to be a combat mage.  I thought her…personality would be a good fit,” Selina finished and waited for me to reply.

“I think it will be a few months before I can start hiring a delve team.  I planned to read some of Gareth’s books before going with Callem to the delving adventurer halls in Aegis city,” I said making the venture sound all the more real in my mind.

“Keep Talia in mind then,” Selina sounded disappointed that I didn’t jump on her offspring immediately.

“Selina I wanted to ask you about getting some more spell books. The cold rain this week made me wonder if there is a spell out there to regulate temperature around the body,” I inquired.

She tapped her chin, “both your cleanliness spell and privacy spells can address this with the correct evolutions but I suppose evolutions are getting scarcer and scarcer for you.”  She paused then said,” Two spells I know of, *thermostatic aura* is a tier 3 healing spell.  It creates a small bubble around the mage at a constant temperature.  The aether cost varies based on the temperature differential.  The other spell is called *divert the elements*.  It is a nature spell that is tier 2 and funnels wind, rain, heat, and cold into an object.  The first spell might be better for you as you can evolve the size of the aura…”

“Can you get me a copy of the *thermostatic aura* spell?”  I asked hopefully.  Selina nodded.

“I should be able to commission a copy through Talia,” she grinned at me.  Having her granddaughter do me a favor would link me to her.

“Fine,” I gave in.  “Let me know the cost and I will arrange the coins.”  Selina’s wolffish grin didn’t help my mood.

I left Selina and headed to the tavern to meet with Isla.  Isla and Bylura were talking in their room when I arrived.  Bylura quickly excused herself and Isla turned to me irritated, “I looked for you at the barracks Storme.  No one knew where you wandered off to after you cooked some meat buns!” she sounded like she was scolding me.

“Well I am here now and I have paid for your services so you will serve at my pleasure when the time is convenient for me,” I returned her tone back at her and it hit her like a slap.  “Show me what you have completed,” I instructed in a calmer voice after a pause.

Isla hesitated and was reorienting herself in the conversation.  I was getting fed up with women who thought they could do what they wanted to me and boss me around.  She slowly added, “I went to Aegis city during the week and hired a build team to start reinforcing the outer walls of the warehouse.  I plan to just use the existing warehouse as a shell around your building.  I have the plans here for you to review.”  She had reverted to all business and her tone mellowed.

I took the plans and started asking questions when I had a little trouble deciphering the engineering jargon.  The largest expense was going to be the plumbing.  The pipes were going to be magic-hardened fired clay but just the sheer amount of plumbing required was a headache.  Maybe it would be easier to establish each apartment with its own water accumulators.  No, the cost would be substantial, and then charging devices would be time-consuming.

“I want a second roof cistern for hot water,”  I stated not looking up.  If I was going to invest so much in plumbing might as well have hot water too. Maybe I could use my metal shaping and make copper pipes.

I finally looked up at Isla who was writing notes slowly.  She said, “Running hot water is a luxury only found in the capital and people who like to flaunt their wealth.”  The last was slightly accusatory.

“I am only building this once and getting it right the first time is important to me,” I said sounding unconcerned.

“It is a waste to build such luxury apartments in the lower city.  You are not going to find enough people wanting to rent them,” she said trying to tease out my intentions.

“Filling the apartments is my problem.  I think I am only going to add balconies to the living units facing the plaza.  The ones facing the adjacent warehouse will just have windows.  I am going to need to furnish all the apartments with the basics.  Next time you are in the city can you get me cost estimates for all that furniture?  The furniture should be ordered soon so it is ready when the apartments are finished.”

Isla made some notes, “I should probably travel to Greatwood island.  They do the best work and with demand currently down I can get you some good pricing.  Do you want all 20 apartments fully furnished?” She asked looking expectantly at me.

“Just 19 apartments.  Loriel can furnish her own,” I said with a grin. “And that includes basic bedding and kitchenware.  Can you handle all of that?”  Isla pursed her lips at the volume of the task.

“Yes and I can focus on getting your skyship warehouse completed first so we can store the items as they are produced,”  she tapped her index finger on the table.  “I will need deposits for everything,” she added.

Well hopefully Isla had good taste, “I don’t have any coin.  You can stop and see Wynna with these plans and see if she wants to make any changes.  She will give you enough coin to cover the deposits.

We spent another hour making changes and discussing the plans for the second-floor brewery.  I think in my past life I had brewed some home beer but the memory was foggy and I couldn’t draw on it.  I asked Isla to set up four brewing stations and she could bring in a consultant if needed for the setup.

I left Isla working and stopped by Ennet’s house where Aelyn, Callem, and Wynna were staying.  Only Aelyn was there.  “Hi, Aelyn.  I just came by to drop off some platinum for Wynna to give to Isla Bricio. Isla has the plans for the warehouse renovations fro Wynna to review.  She should be stopping by this evening.” I produced a bag of 30 platinum coins from my space and placed it softly on the table.

Aelyn was cooking some fried chicken or at least trying.  I moved to the kitchen to help her and gave her a cooking lesson while we talked.  She seemed happy and Callem and Wynna were treating her well.  I promised her again that I would remove her tattoo and break her binding to the ring I wore.

We talked about Aelyn’s spell imprinting.  She was working on a spell called *shadow merge*. It was a simple illusion spell that allowed the mage to become invisible in a shadow.  The mage couldn’t move while in the shadow but it was a very effective hiding technique.  She had received the spellbook from Wynna as a gift. I packed some chicken fingers in my pocket space and left Aelyn at the house.

I went to the smith in town to find out the cost of copper. I ordered a platinum coin’s worth of copper bars through the smith. I figured this would be easier than making the copper myself for the pipes. The smith said copper was mined in a dungeon of the capital island and it should only take a week to get it transported here. I told him to contact Isla at the tavern and have her transport it to Aegis city. She was going to love me for the extra work.

I went to the general store and got two dozen notepads. The weather was chilly so I decided to go to Callem’s farm for some peace and quiet the rest of the day. It was a brisk 30-minute walk and when I got there I heard someone in my old bunkhouse. I snuck closer under the effect of my privacy spell and listened at the window. It was Gareth and Brianne. Although I was certain it was their voices I couldn’t hear what they were saying.

It didn’t take a genius to figure out why they would be all the way out here. I decided to not disturb them at the moment. I left a personalized alarm on the door that would only alert Gareth with a loud bang when he left. Then I added six more in a row. It was the least I could do for my friend who made me waste my time trudging all the way out here only to have to return.

It was late when I got back to my room in the barracks. A lot of the students had returned including the twins who had gotten me a deep blue nightshirt. It was pounded linen and extremely soft. I thanked them for the gift. They tried to get me to cook them a late meal but I wanted to study so I just gave them the crispy chicken fingers in my dimensional space after I went to the basement larder. Since the chicken was still warm they asked how I cooked the chicken in the basement. I told them I just reheated it.

I then locked myself in my room, set my alarms, and wrapped myself in a privacy screen. It was late when my alarms went off, Gareth was back and immediately jumped onto my bed through my privacy screen. “Storme you bastard!” He said a little unseriously as he tried to pin me. “I shit my pants when those alarms kept going off! I thought Callem had found me out!” It didn’t take long for Gareth to pin me.

“Hey, Gareth you win. Now get off me! I didn’t disturb you and Brianne. I let you do whatever you were doing. The alarms were just to let you know I was there. The fact you shit yourself was your own fault!” I said struggling. He let me up after a minute and sat on his bed.

“If it wasn’t me I would think what you did was funny. But the fact the alarm only went off in my head…Brianne thought I was losing my mind!” Gareth huffed.

I shook my head. “Well, at least you had some fun today brother,” I told him about my day.

Gareth was shocked, “So a bad day for you is turning down a date from the twins. Spending a day practicing magic with a beautiful young mage. Spending hours with a beautiful architect while spending dozens of platinum. And then having dinner with Aelyn? Really Stormy?”

I shrugged, “Yep, just look at all the things I had to do today. On my day off! Now if you don’t mind I need to work on spell imprinting for a bit longer before getting some sleep. Next time just tell me your plans so I don’t waste my time going somewhere where I am not wanted.”

I set up my privacy screen after resetting my alarms and focused on the *lightning reflexes* spell.

When I woke a made some platinum coins and joined my fellows for conditioning with Aelyn. Aelyn spoke, “Today we are going to play a game. The team leaders are Storme and Gareth. They will select members alternating and then we will run all courses sequentially. The team with the best average improved time will get out of conditioning tomorrow.” A buzz rang up among the students. A morning off from conditioning was definitely a prize worth going all out for.

I selected the twins with my first two picks and then Mia. Gareth chose the fastest males with his first three picks. I would have selected my brother next but Gareth had already selected him. I picked lean students after that and when we were done Brianne was the last selected and fell on my team. Gareth had selected his team to win and Brianne was the slowest student. The death stare she gave him had Gareth sweating and realizing his mistake too late.

I circled my team up and got my three fastest people to plan to assist the slower people over the more difficult obstacles. I hoped this would help improve their time substantially. At first, Gareth’s team looked confused as our fastest three runners stopped and helped the slower members of our team. But when the body of the team was well ahead of the slower runners in the other group it was obvious we were going to win. Gareth tried to protest the victory saying I had cheated by helping the others Aelyn just smirked as she averaged out the times. We didn’t win by a lot but it was enough and we got the reward of being able to sleep in tomorrow.

I saw Bylura and Callem talking as we moved from the training yard to breakfast. They had watched our display. At breakfast, it was clear Brianne was angry with Gareth for not selecting her for his team, but at least she was on the winning team.

The rest of the week I got to see Gareth’s relationship with Brianne implode. Even though he was downcast I just told him there would be more women in his future and not to stress about it. At least he didn’t blame me for winning the race.

On 4th day Callem announced at lunch that we would be having a scrimmage with the first-year academy in Aegis city. It was going to be a week from this 6th day, so 9 days off. It was going to be a descending-ranked match. That meant the top two fighters would face off, then the second-ranked fighters, then the third….all the way down the rolls. We would be spending the next few days ranking everyone.

I ranked third behind Gareth and Pascal. At first, I was confused but then I learned who my opponent would be. Leon Mogensen. The red-haired devil. I had zero concerns going into the competition. My staff and sword work had improved by quite a large margin since the qualifiers when I had last bested the young man who had tried to kill me. Defeating him again still wouldn’t erase what he had done to me but it would make me feel better.

The city academy had 33 members to our 28. It was decided the bottom five of their academy would draw random names to fight. I had to fight twice, my second match was against their 31st-ranked. Everyone in our academy was excited to test their skills against the city academy.

The twins asked for extra lessons from Gareth who obliged. To my consternation, the twins were actually taking pity on Gareth after Brianne was giving him the cold shoulder for not selecting him in the team conditioning competition. Gareth’s relationship with Fera was almost back to pre-Brianne levels by the time 7th day came. Gareth and the twins invited me to the city to watch a play but I turned them down. Selina was going to help me with my *lightning reflexes* spell.

I arrived early and was glad that Talai was not in her small apartment. We spent ten hours working on the spell. A lot of it was review from the previous weeks but I finally made a small breakthrough! The first and second spell forms were easy to picture in my head now. I was so close to imprinting the spell. I actually hugged Selina before I left because for the first time, I felt I had made significant progress with the spell.

When I knocked on Isla’s door near dinner time she answered and wore an irritated face but didn’t voice her frustration. “Storme thanks for stopping by. We have a lot to discuss.” I entered and sat at the small table in the room that was covered in drawings and notes.

I started sliding the papers around but Isla interrupted me. “I talked with Wynna and she passed along some funds to me. I have ordered the furniture for the apartments and equipment for the kitchen and brewery. Wynna has taken on the task of ordering the mattresses, curtains, and other linens.” My eyebrows shot up. Maybe they would help pay for some of the things.

“Wynna and Callem selected the corner unit on the second floor for their residence. Loriel has selected the corner unit on the third floor for hers,” Isla added. So the best two apartments were now claimed. I tapped the unit on the third floor closest to the hanger and facing the plaza.

“This unit will be mine. And the adjacent unit will be Gareth’s. The unit across the hall from me will be Mera’s and Fera’s.” I pointed out the apartments. Isla noted the allocations.

We spent time going over how much did I want to invest in reinforcing the warehouse and the structure we were building inside of it. I went with a modest strengthing plan that Isla suggested. We then talked about the copper bars I had ordered and I told her of my plans to hire someone to make copper pipes. She was just to transport the bars to the warehouse.

Then we got to the fun part. The layout of the restaurant. The private function room would have a large table with seating for 32. The main dining room would have tables and seating for 122. The bakery would have booths and seating for just 24. For the main dining room, I wanted the walls painted with murals of fantastic creatures. I gave her the address of the artist who had made my plates. He had 23 creatures that he drew. I had three sets of the plates, each set had the same creatures but in different poses. I want the murals to be floor-to-ceiling, so 15 feet in height. That meant the dining tables could be placed along the walls which I was fine with.

It was getting late and Isla now had a new laundry list of things to do. Next off day, we were going to travel together to Aegis city to review the progress on the building. The workers she had hired had been busy and the repairs should be completed by then so she could begin the interior construction. I was excited.

I left a happy architect. She should have enough funds for a month at least. I would just stockpile some coins to give Callem.

It was extremely late when I returned to the barracks. I found Fera on Gareth’s bed studying a dungeon-delving book together. Mera was on my bed with the same book. I grabbed some of Gareth's other books and began to page through them on my bed next to Mera. Gareth was shocked for a moment before returning to studying with Fera.

I was looking for the suggested dungeon team composition. It depended largely on how many people a dungeon allowed inside. The core of the team was always a melee fighter. The second member was something I would call a tank. The third member was a support healing role. The fourth was a ranged scout to protect the flanks in battle. The fifth was a powerful magic class that had strong ranged spells. And the sixth spot was called the flex based on the type of dungeon terrain and monsters the team was going to encounter. Six was the usual number of adventurers that a dungeon allowed inside to challenge it.

I made notes in one of my new notebooks and then asked Mera to leave so I could get some sleep.

The next day instructor Aldon Aethon handed me 46 large gold coins. All the light globes I had produced were sold. I was experimenting with various colored epoxy now. But it was as Aldon had predicted others were copying my glode design and functionality. His best guess was the price point was going to stabilize at around 12 gold. With materials and tax, I would get around 8 gold per sale. Not a lot but I would make ten of the globes every week. Partly for covering my wealth and partly to work on my enchanting.

On the fourth day in the evening, I was studying the lightning reflexes spell and something clicked for me. I ended up working through the night and by morning I felt the spell book crumble in my dimensional space. Dungeon spell books only worked once which meant…it was the most beautiful thing I had seen on my aether matrix. The lightning reflexes spell was clearly imprinted there. I almost got out of bed to try it but forced myself to get a few hours of sleep before conditioning.