Chapter 101

The heavy, thick rain was also loud.  We all pulled out oil cloaks and wrapped ourselves tight. Even under the cloak, my metal helmet echoed a constant cadence of thunks as we pressed on.  My immediate thought was remembering our raft trip from the capital.  This rain was similar except that it now also had a chill to it.  Even with my oiled cloak wrapped tight, my clothes were drenched, and it drained my body heat, and I shivered.  Blaze, to my left, was not faring any better.  I couldn’t see anyone else clearly.

We walked for two hours and finally reached a town with an inn and stable.  Adrian did not hesitate to stop. Once we were in the stable, we could hear Adrian’s voice.  “Feels unnatural.  Too much rain, too fast, like when the river flooded on our way to Sobral.”

“Is the mage close then?”  Lucien said, shivering.

“Hard to tell with weather magic.  It might be a powerful elemental or a mage, and he could be standing next to you or fifty miles away.  He is definitely aiming to destroy the fields.  The last harvest is this month, and dozens of farms are along this road.  It is going to be a hard winter this year,” Adrian said sadly.

A man came crashing into the stable.  He had been running to avoid the rain.  “Thought I saw someone out here.  Legionnaires, are you staying?  This rain seems perilous to travel in.”  Adrian nodded reluctantly.  We had only traveled half a day.  The man smiled, “A large copper for each horse includes feed.  You will have to muck your own stalls.  The stable boy lives a half mile away and will not be in tonight.”

“Rooms?” Adrian asked.

“Two left, two beds each.  You can sleep in the loft free if you like,” the man offered.

“Decimus and Scholar Favian can take one room.  Blaze and I, the other.  Lucien and Eryk take care of the horses.  The loft is yours tonight,” Adrian sorted.  They left us, and Lucien and I used a glow stone to hang everything we could to dry them out.

“You know Lareen has a spell form that could dry these things in seconds,” I told Lucien trying to make conversation.

“The maid the Duchess assigned you?” he asked, and I confirmed with a nod.  “Not as pretty as the one Kolm had assigned, but one of the nicer ones,” he assessed.  “I was assigned a young man, Heath.  He is good at his job but not someone I care to keep my bed warm at night.”

“Are the others indulging with their servants,” I asked as carefully as possible.

“Most. The Duchess is doing her best to make our company as happy as possible. Everyone is certainly working harder because of it,” Lucien replied while emptying the packs that had water on the inside. I had the unenviable task of checking the horse’s shoes and cleaning the packed clay with a pick. Lucien began to rub them down, getting as much water off as possible.

It took a good hour before the seven horses were cared for. Blaze brought us steaming bowls of chicken and carrot soup, “The inn is a small converted house, you are not missing much other than the fire.”

The hot soup bowl warmed my hands as I tilted the bowl. The soup seemed mostly broth, but it was the heat warming me from the inside out that I craved. Blaze waited till we finished before asking if we wanted another bowl, which we both declined. It had been a large bowl, almost half a gallon. The rain had not slowed and echoed on the roof of the stables. After Blaze left, we checked out the loft.

The loft ran the length of the stables over the center walkway with openings above the stalls. Rough-cut boards made up the floor. There was l bailed staw at one end. Tiny grains of black rice were everywhere. Well, not rice, mouse, and rat shit. Lucien was already making a hand broom with the straw to sweep an area clear. I did likewise near the ladder.

“Wish I had a thermal stone instead of a light stone,” Lucien mumbled as he removed his wet clothes and hung them in the rafters. He had just one long dry shift in his bag that he put on while shivering. “At least the roof is not leaking.” His bedroll was obviously wet.

I asked, “What is a thermal stone? Is it for making fires?”

“Can be. Depends on how hot the stone is artificed to get. They are a bit too heavy to carry around. I can not channel aether anyway. You charge it with aether, and it emits heat for a few hours. The first mage company I was in, a legionnaire, carried a first-sized one with him. It was weak, but he kept it in his bedroll at night.”

We set up our damp bedding. “Can you charge this?” He tossed me his glow stone, and I did as requested before sending it back. “We should leave them out to keep the mice at bay.” I nodded and placed a glow stone on either side of me.

I stripped as well, hanging my wet laundry, but Lucien was already trying to sleep, so I took out a dry tunic, sending the wet one to my storage. My wet tunic was quickly dampened in the wet bedroll from my pack. I had one other bedroll in my dimensional space, but it was the heavy one I had taken from the First Citizen Justin when I escorted him with the griffin egg.

Lucien soon snoring, and I considered using the amulet but decided against it. The pounding rain created white noise, and I drifted off. My dreams were of being swift down a river and over a waterfall and drowning. When I hit the bottom, I was bouncing on the rocks. My eyes shot open. The horses were kicking their stalls and neighing in fear of something.

I put on my helm and grabbed my sheathed sword. My spear was left below. Lucien was alert as well, as I could see him sitting up. The rain was still heavy and loud, and I could see some minor flooding in the horse stalls, but that was not what was spooking the horses. Then, the stables doors were swinging open. The light from the loft did below well. I remained still and waited, as did Lucien. Whatever was in the doorway was short and humanoid.

It cautiously entered, and enough light illuminated the creature for me to see it clearly. It was a familiar creature, a goblin. This goblin did not have any weapons and was wearing rags. It also had greenish skin, not the brown skin of the ones I had fought before. Even though the light was up in the loft, the creature never looked up as it entered. It was moving toward our packs.

Lucien gave me the hand sign that I should wait. There were two ladders in the loft, both were near me and a distance away from Lucien. He was moving to the edge over the stalls and was going to descend that way to cut off the goblin’s retreat.

A second and then a third green goblin entered. The heavy rain was masking any sound we made, but Lucien’s movement created shifting shadows, and the last goblin in looked up. It fled out the door as Lucien swung down and blocked the other two from escaping. I descended quickly, and the two were stuck between us. My blade was drawn, but neither of the goblins had any weapons. Then, one of them drew a small three-inch knife from inside the folds of its rags.

It stood defiantly facing me. The other one faced Lucien but did not pull weapons, but hissed angrily at him. It actually looked to be shaking in fear.

I talked loud enough to be heard over the rain, “Never seen green goblins before.”

“They are burrowers and scavengers. We will be doing the locals a favor by eliminating this pair. Too bad more did not enter for us to trap,” he replied.

My goblin lunged, and my blade pierced its skull through the eye as I had much longer reach. I flicked it down off my blade and had already cut into the neck of the other goblin. Lucien relaxed and turned to the door. I inspected the small creatures. Their bodies were clean from the rain, and they looked thin and frail. They were not as large as the brown ones I had fought in legion training.

Lucien approached and inspected the bodies, “They either got flooded out, or they come by here regularly. Most likely, they will not be coming back tonight, having lost two of their number.”

“Should we go and tell Adrian?” I asked. Lucien looked through the crack in the door. It was still pouring outside. “No, it can wait till morning. They are just nuisances. We will toss these two outside so the blood does not continue to get the horses riled up.”

The two riding mounts were getting loud in their stall. The war mounts, who had alerted us, were calm now. I think it was Ginger who had kicked to wake us up. Not caring that Lucien saw, I gave each another apple and rubbed between the ears. Lucien tossed both bodies outside. They looked pretty light.

The adrenaline of combat faded, and I thought about the collector but decided this one was a lost cause. We both lay down again, but I couldn’t sleep. Lucien was snoring softly in no time. I stayed up waiting and listening to the rain. About two hours after the goblin’s raid, the rain suddenly stopped. The quiet felt odd after hours of hard rain. Lucien was quiet, and the horses shifted every few moments in their stall, but otherwise, it was quiet.

I climbed down quietly and looked outside. The goblin bodies were gone. Maybe their companions took them. It was still hours before sunrise, but the blue moon was giving light through thin clouds. Standing puddles of still water were causing weird reflections of the moon. The air was warmer—more humid as well.

“Everything good down there?” Lucien asked from above me, looking over the edge. I guess I had not been as quiet as I had thought.

“Yeah, it just seems eerie quiet now. The goblin bodies are gone. I am going to get suited and wait till morning in my armor,” I said while looking out across the road toward the town buildings. There were a few dim lights in the windows, but I did not see any movement. Lucien groaned in disappointment as he started to dress as well.

Putting on cold, damp clothes is never fun. Lucien was mumbling to himself, and I just suffered through it. We were dressed and sitting down by the stalls. Lucien asked, “Do you have another apple?” I handed him one.

While he was munching away, I asked, “Does everything just feel off to you?”

Between bites, he answered, “Magical weather does that. Meddling with weather on this scale will cause problems hundreds of miles away. I don’t know what, but I heard a desert on another continent was made because a king wanted his garden watered daily.”

“At least it brought warmer weather,” I noted. Lucien shrugged.

As soon as the sky turned gray, we went to the inn. Blaze was right; this was a small converted house. A hearty fire was burning in the tiny common room, and four men were curled up in front of it. They must have been travelers as well. Lucien did not care if he woke them and moved a table and pair of chairs by the fire for us. The men on the floor cursed but moved out of the way.

The noise brought the innkeeper, who was in a tiny kitchen in the back. We soon had a breakfast of dense biscuits and eggs scrambled with onion. As we ate, Adrian came down the stairs and grabbed a chair to join us, “Any trouble last night?”

Lucien talked through a mouthful, “Some green goblin thieves. Eryk handled two of them, and the rest ran off. Only saw three.”

Adrian nodded unconcerned, “Must have had their burrows flooded out. The innkeeper did not mention any goblin problems last night at dinner.” The innkeeper placed a plate of biscuits and eggs in front of him, he had overheard.

The innkeeper noted, “Some farms have been missing some chickens, but no goblin problems reported legionnaire.” Adrian nodded.

“Can I get another—double portion this time?” I asked, handing him two large copper and my empty plate. I was guessing that was more than enough. He brought a plate stacked with eggs and biscuits and a pitcher of weak ale for me. Adrian poured himself a drink from the pitcher.

As I ate, Adrian and Lucien talked about the goblins. Blaze joined us as I finished the plate. Soon, the alchemist, still red, and the Scholar came down. Lucien and I went and readied the horses. An hour later, we were on the road heading east. The town had been on a hill off the road and fared well in the heavy rain. The road was packed with clay and dirt, and some standing puddles were up to two feet deep. A rushing stream was as high as a stone bridge crossing. The riding horses had to be led across by their reigns.

The bridge crossing was the only danger we encountered in the morning. The rain had not reached more than twenty miles from our town. Adrian pushed us as hard as the alchemist could handle. We stayed in an inn in a town or a city each night. I was usually with Blaze and Lucien, while Adrian shared a room with our charges. During the day, I ended up riding beside the Scholar mostly, as I seemed to be the only one with patience enough to listen to him. He talked about the elven language, his specialization. I listened and even took to learning a few words.

Most nights, I was in the dreamscape for four or five hours, splitting time between studying the Tsinga books, the time affinity spell form, and practicing with the dreamscape manifestations of Konstantin, Adrian, and Xavier.

We reached the city of Loule in five days and stayed the night in the Legion Hall, even the alchemist and Scholar. It was breaking the rules, but Adrian did not care. This stop put us just forty miles from Sobral. The alchemist’s skin was fading daily, and he was more pink than red after the week we traveled with him. I think he was relieved that he was actually fading, and he swore he would get back at the old alchemist in Lorvo who did this to him.

Adrian was planning to push the last forty miles the next day.