Chapter 66 (Arc 2 Chapter 20)

The proverbial cat was out of the bag. I watched as Gareth kept Lana from escaping his inquisition and was about to intervene when Sammie put herself between Gareth and Lana. Gareth held up his hands in innocence as Sammie laid into him, protecting her teammate.

Gareth went to plan B and started pointing at me, but Sammie didn’t turn around. I started laughing, and Gareth seeing my mirth stepped around Sammie and approached me. Sammie was talking to Lana as Gareth got close enough to talk, “Stormy! So who is that mound of muscle? She wouldn’t even tell me her name! Come on, you know I know more about dungeons than anyone you know. Was this group my surprise birthday gift?” He put his arm around me and pulled me tight to face Sammie and Lana.

His attempt at camaraderie was more to show that we were friends to the two young women rather than a display of true affection. I decided to needle him, “I already have a team leader Gareth.” I removed his arm from around my shoulder. “Besides, we already agreed you were going to be a waiter in the restaurant.”

“Stormy!” he held his heart with both hands as I had just stabbed him. “How could you!” he said mockingly. “I will even work for free! Just let me on your delve team.”

I pretended to give it some serious thought. Whenever Gareth needed money, all he had to do was Storme’s Bank and made a withdrawal. With his winnings from the tournament, he hadn’t asked for any coin recently. “Fine, if you can convince the team leader to take you on, I will allow it. His name is Gimble, and Sammie, Lana, and Remy are headed to see him at the Guild Hall to train. His eyes lit up, and he gave me a genuine hug.

Gareth spun around, scanning the passengers, “Which one is Remy? I am guessing that is her, definitely your type Storme.” He pointed at a woman in a flowing blue silk top with dark brown canvas pants. He didn’t wait for me to affirm it and just walked straight toward her.

Sammie and Lana approached me. Sammie spoke, “Is that man actually your friend?” She asked, sounding dubious.

“Yep, my best friend. He is actually younger than me. Don’t be fooled by his goofiness, it is how he seduces innocent women. He is actually an exceptional athlete and warrior.” Sammie was studying Gareth intently as the woman he was talking to suddenly slapped him. I chuckled, “He has gotten more brazen with women recently.” Gareth was scanning the other passengers who were now giving him a wider berth. He approached another woman in athletic clothes.

Lana, who was hiding behind Sammie, asked, “What is he doing?”

“I told him Remy was on board. He is trying to find him, but I think he assumed I hired another pretty face to match you two,” I said and saw Sammie blush and Lana hide behind her friend’s large frame to hide her own red face.

It was a few minutes and two failed Gareth attempts later when Lana voiced, “We should warn Aelyn about Gareth if he is going to join the team.”

I started laughing, “No need. Aelyn and Gareth already know each other.” I decided to throw Gareth a bone, “Gareth is the one who liberated Aelyn. We are still trying to find a way to remove the servitude mark.”

Sammie said quietly, “That is what Aelyn said about her mark. When do you think you can free her of it?” Sammie obviously liked Aelyn and didn’t like the idea of marking people.

“I hope to get a solid dungeon team and then make a trip to the lowlands. While we are down there, I will find someone,” I said sincerely, and both Lana and Sammie nodded.

“I think Remy went below deck to look at the runic script for the enchantments. At least, that was what he was talking about with an engineer earlier,” We all laughed. Gareth had exhausted the three women on deck and was moving onto the young men with reluctance. He did look over for help, but I just gave him a thumbs up.

When we landed, Remy joined the group, and Gareth immediately started talking to him. With Gareth and Remy talking in the back, my group entered the warehouse restaurant entrance. The painter was hard at work on his fourth panel. Gareth and Remy paused to take in the succubus painting while I looked at the three new additions. The first was a black dragon with shimmering red eyes. On its back was a female warrior in shiny plate mail waving a sword, and she had black hair streaming behind her.

The third image was an ogre in all its glory fighting an indistinct adventurer. A smashed-open chest was on the ground nearby with gold and silver coins strewn about. The current panel, the artist was working on, was a pack of harpies hovering over a dead cow with blood and gore on them. Each harpy had a necklace with a silver coin on it. I approached and complimented him on his work so far. He said Isla was on the third floor with the stone mage.

“Sammie, why don’t you take Gareth, Remy, and Lana to see Gimble. I think all the talk about the building will be boring for you. But the apartments are being built upstairs. I am guessing three or four more weeks before you can move in here.” They had to drag Gareth and Remy from the succubus panel. I went upstairs.

The second-floor walls were complete, and I walked into a few rooms. The stone mage had done a good job. The walls were smooth, and the bathrooms had cavities for future plumbing. I walked to the third floor and found the stone mage working on some walls. We talked briefly, and he said Isla was on the roof with the arborist. I asked him about adding toilets, showers, and sinks to the apartments. He said it was on his list after finishing the structure.

I climbed the ladder to the roof as the stairs had not been installed yet. Isla was talking with an old man and younger boy. Isla waved to me and smiled, “Storme! Did you see the progress! Did you check out the warehouse? We have received most of the furniture already!” She was giddy with excitement. “This is Barrow Winters. He is an expert arborist and we were discussing the options for the roof. The young man is his apprentice.”

I shook hands with the white hair and wrinkled man. “You are young,” he started. “Isla was telling me you wanted gardens up on your roof here. I told her it was possible but keeping everything hydrated is going to take a lot of water.”

“Not a problem. There will be tanks on the roof for plumbing with condenser runes on them to harvest water,” his eyebrows went up in surprise at my statement. “I am an enchanter,” I explained. He nodded.

“So Storme, there are a few options. I would suggest putting a solid wall around the perimeter to start, maybe five feet in height. Otherwise, the winds might destroy everything. Most of the gardens will need to be closer to that wall, but I do know so hardier plants for the center of the roof. I even know a few species of dungeon trees if you are interested, but then we will need a platform, so we have room for their root systems….”

The conversation lasted hours as his apprentice took notes. Most of what I wanted up here was to supply the restaurant with fresh produce and herbs. We decided on a number of fruit bushes, and the rest of the space was going to be gardens and paths. Isla had waited for us to finish.

I took the ladder down to the third floor. “The stairs to the roof will be installed this week. The stone mage is planning to add arches in the hanger so that end of the roof can support a skyship as well.” She paused, “I will need more funds.”

We walked to where my room was going to be on the floor. A window opening had been added. “I want a larger window, floor to ceiling, for my room.” I looked at Isla, “How many coins do you need?”

She pulled a parchment out of her pocket and handed it to me. It was an itemized list. I looked it over. She had everything on the sheet that she had spent to date and expected future expenses. “I thought you would want to know the final cost. Or at least a close estimate,” Isla said. I continued to review the list. Construction, furniture, security, kitchen appliances… twenty-six lines in total.

I spent a while reviewing the list. “Do you have receipts?” I asked in jest.

Isla didn’t hesitate, “Yes, the recent accounting is off by 2 gold, 19 silver. I will reimburse you if I can’t find where it was expensed.” That was an unexpected admission.

I looked at the bottom line, 41 platinum, 88 gold to complete the building. I reached into my pocket and pulled 7 platinum from my space and handed it to her. “When do you need the rest?” I asked.

Isla took the coins, “I need half by next 7th day. So another 15 platinum,” she smiled. “I was going to see Wynna tomorrow and ask. If I don’t get the coins, it just means I might lose the build teams, and finishing will take longer. Right now, I expect construction to finish in three weeks.” Isla was beaming. It had been an extremely fast rebuild.

I was thinking about getting Wynna the 35 platinum when Isla started talking again, “You were amazing yesterday. Loriel was smug when she said you were going to lose to Tessa. I even won two gold from her when you won.”

“Did Loriel know her injury transfer ability?” I asked.

“Is that what that was? Yeah, she said something about punching yourself in the face when you would fight her,” she said while pocketing the coins.

“And she didn’t tell me?” I left the question hanging. If Loriel was trying to get closer to me then not telling me about Tessa Torrent’s ability was a huge negative.

“I…I don’t think…I think she was just as surprised about the matchup. Tessa should have been fighting first, not second,” she made excuses for her friend. But maybe that was true. I would have lost to her brother unless I activated my *lightning reflexes* spell.

“Make sure she doesn’t land her skyship on my building!” I said while walking away and descending the stairs. I planned to go purchase a spell book before I headed back to Hen’s Hollow. Isla raced to catch up with me.

“Do you want to get something to eat?” She asked with a smile. I gave in, and we ate at a small restaurant near the store that sold spellbooks. I listened to Isla prattle on about the project, only half interested.

I was thinking about my spellbooks. I planned to learn *thermostatic aura*, a tier 3 spell next. I wanted a more powerful healing spell as well. The *ranged healing* spell was tier 4, but I didn’t want to invest weeks learning it. So a tier 3 healing spell that could repair bones is what I was seeking at the spellbook vender. The two offensive lightning spellbooks I had were currently at the back of my list to learn as I couldn’t practice them without revealing I had them. The more spells I kept to myself, the better off I would be in an unforeseen confrontation.

Isla was tapping my arm, “So do you think I could rent one of the rooms?” I was brought back to the one-sided conversation. My face contorted in uncertainty. Had she been smiling all day to preempt this question?

“I don’t think I have further use of your services….” I started.

“Oh,” she grinned, “but you do! I have a small background in skyship construction and have been studying the subject in depth. I can help you build your skyship!”

I was curious, “What is your background?”

Her grin faded, “I took a course at the academy, and….we made a field trip to the naval yards.”

My eyebrows went up in question, and she slouched in her chair. I sippled the weak ale, “Well, let me see how the warehouse comes out and if you can hold to this budget,” I tapped the paper. She smiled weakly. I already knew cost overruns were normal. “Do you think I can open the restaurant in three weeks? If that is the case, I need to look for some cooks and waiters. Please get me information on suitable salaries for restaurant staff.” I stood and left enough silver coin to pay for both our meals. “It was nice to have lunch with you Isla,” I gave her a strong smile and walked out.

I no longer had any trepidation walking by myself. I felt I could handle anything with my *aether shield* and my *lightning reflexes* spells. I made my way to the spellbook vender. The shop was much fancier than *Margold’s Mystical Emporium* in Solaris. It was called *Kali’s Spells and Cantrips*. I started to make my way to the back and was intercepted by a middle-aged woman with salt and pepper hair.

“Young man, if I may guide you to a desk?” She asked politely. I was confused so she explained. “There is a directory of our spells there, and they are indexed with short descriptions. If you wish to view a spellbook just call an attendant, and they will bring it to you,” she fully detailed the process.

“That is not what I was expecting,” I said, and she gave me a thin smile.

“Yes, we have found this the best way to serve our patrons. Refreshments will be brought to your table,” she sounded slightly irritated. I had to remember I didn’t look like your typical mage. I was wearing nice comfortable clothes for working out in and was quite young.

I sat at one of the tables and was eyed by a woman and an older man who was enjoying a drink and finger food while paging through a large tomb. A similar tomb was on my desk. A glass and pitcher appeared and a young woman asked if there was anything she could get me from the tavern across the street. I told her I had just had lunch and pulled the tomb to me.

The book was indexed, and I went to healing spells first. Tier 3 spells, *lesser restoration, restore sight, bottomless stamina,* and *paralyze*. *The lesser restoration* was the spell I came here for. It restored a person to their optimal state when it healed. It could reset bones, and the aether cost depended on the amount of damage being healed. I called an attendant to get me the oldest copy listed in the index. Older usually meant better, as the prior mage would have left notes. The *bottomless stamina* spell just burned through a person’s fat stores to keep them going. There were potions that could do the same and not sacrifice a person’s health. However, the spell could be used as a weight loss spell.

The *paralyze* spell was very interesting. It saturated a person’s nervous system and incapacitated them that way. When the attendant brought me the *lesser restoration* spell book, I asked for that book but was informed I could only review one book at a time. I paged through the lesser restoration spellbook, and it was old and well-used. As I suspected, it had notes inside, but in a language, I was unfamiliar with. I called over the young attendant and asked if they had a copy of the spell with notes in the common tongue. She took the book and went back to the shelves.

I turned to the lightning spells. They had a tier 5 spell for sale! It was called *Eye of the Storm*. It created a zone of lightning bolts in a 100-foot sphere around the mage. The mage was immune to the lightning, and with spell evolutions, the mage could select others in the sphere to be safe as well. The cost of 2500 gold for the spell was too much to spend today. The *lesser restoration* already cost 340 gold.

The only other lighting spell in the book I liked was *lightning wall*. It was tier 4, and it created a 144-square-foot lighting wall 5 feet thick. It would be useful in blocking off corridors or putting your back in an open space when fighting. The attendant put down a new copy of the *lesser restoration* spell, and I paged through it, looking at the notes in the margin. “Thank you. I will take this. Can you bring me the *paralyze* book next?” I told the young woman helping me. The old man, who was still paging through the index book, looked over at me in surprise.

The young woman was more energetic now, and the paralyze spellbook was quickly in my hand. I read a more in-depth description, and the spell was not that great. It required touch to use, and you needed to maintain contact to keep the effect. The evolutions allowed for the paralyzing effect to linger after you stopped contact with your target, but I decided the spell was not worth learning at this time, and it was 400 gold.

I gave the book to return to the shelves and went to the illusion spells. I wanted to get Lana one or two spells. I still had the *illusionary companion* spell, but that was a waste for her. Her tier 4 affinity with illusion magic meant she learned illusion spells at two tiers lower than I did for healing spells. That meant she could learn a tier 4 illusion spell, and it would only take two slots on her aether matrix instead of eight. A tier 3 illusion spell would take one slot instead of 4. So I was looking for tier 3 and 4 spells for her to learn after the *dimensional closet* spell.

The only tier 3 illusion spell was *phantom mount*. This just created a personal mount for the caster. It was limited in how much it could carry and its speed. Not terribly useful. Both of the tier 4 spells seemed like good options. *Phantom fighter* created an apparition that fought on behalf of the caster. It dissipated when it took a certain amount of damage, but evolutions could make it stronger, faster, and hardier. This could be a very effective spell for Lana. It would cost eight aether units to cast, and she only had 23 currently.

I looked at the other tier 4 spell, *greater invisibility*. This spell created a globe of invisibility centered on the caster. Useful for a group trying to sneak around. The phantom fighter spell was 800 gold, and the greater invisibility spell was 750 gold. I checked my current platinum coin balance in my space. Just 19 platinum and 40 large gold. I needed to start making more coins and not practicing my *lightning reflexes* spell every night.

I asked for both spell books in turn as I couldn’t decide. I actually would have liked to learn the *phantom fighter* spell myself, but I was not going to commit eight slots on my aether matrix to that tier 4 spell. Maybe there was something similar for summoning a lightning elemental? After reviewing both spell books, I choose the *greater invisibility* spell. Since she already knew the *invisibility* spell, it should be easier for her to learn this one. The notes from the previous owner were quite good as well.

I purchased both spellbooks for 1,090 gold. I gave my attendant a large gold tip for all her help. Tipping was not common in Skyholme culture, but it was practiced sparingly. I think I might have overtipped because the two other young female attendants showed jealousy toward their partner.

I slipped both books into my dimensional storage and left the shop. I would have to talk with Selina about getting me specific spells from the capital. Maybe I could ask Callem to contact Sebastian as well. The fallout from the Sadian attack should have settled by now.

I looked both ways on the thoroughfare and decided to go check on how Gimble and Gareth were getting along. I smiled to myself, I would give Lana her spellbook as well.