

That Which Binds Us

Sloane followed the knights as they led her to the blacksmith. Looking around the town in the morning light. The activity was already bustling, townsfolk doing whatever they could to help the construction and defense efforts. They passed the market square which was filled with people purchasing goods while militiamen spread out in groups along the outer edges.

Mostly, she saw various foods and small household items. There were some basic clothing items, but nothing that she would need at the moment. It seemed Ser Gisele's suggestion of obtaining clothing and armor in Thirdghyll would hold.

Soon enough, they arrived at a large building that looked about two and a half stories tall with a single chimney attached to an overhang that held an outside furnace and bellows. Three anvils of various sizes were arranged nearby with racks of tools. A young telv boy seemed to be cleaning up the area.

Cristole called out, "Boy, is the smith available?"

The boy jumped and quickly turned around, eyes widening upon seeing the group of three knights. "Yes milord, I'll get him at once!" he exclaimed. He ran inside the building, accidentally slamming the door in his rush.

Ernald looked amused, "You think he'd never seen a knight before. He was *quick!*"

"He's just excited; you're someone new, and he may bring the smith a new customer. He'll be happy he got to help. More so if we purchase something. First, hand me the core please?"

Cristole grabbed the object from his pouch and handed it to her. "What are you looking to do?"

"I'm looking for either a staff or a scepter. I would prefer a scepter, as it's smaller, but a staff could work. Whatever we can get, it needs to have a setting that can fit the stone. I'm unsure if it should be polished, but I think the safest bet is to not damage it over much for at least our first attempt. I also think there will need to be some type of metal going all the way

from the setting to the grip, that way there is always a connection flowing to Maud, but I'm not sure on that."

She paused, "Thinking about it, I'll need to get tools to do this kind of work when we get to Thirdghyll if the city is everything you guys mentioned. I'm no blacksmith, but I'll need to get everything I'll need to fabricate tools and other objects."

Ismeld nodded then tilted her head in confusion, "Wait... Maud? I thought this was going to be for you?"

Sloane shook her head, "No, Maud is the only one we can definitively say is *able* to use magic. It has to be her to establish if it works. If it does—"

The smith came out of the door before she could finish, interrupting her thoughts. He was a telv, however, if he were human he would have an average height and slightly above average weight. His long, dark red hair was pulled back into a ponytail while his round face and short, pointed ears were red--likely from standing in front of a furnace. He had a close-cropped beard that gave the smile he sported a good-humored appearance. He was the first person she'd met who wanted to shake her hand. He had started to reach out toward her but then noticed his hands were dirty and decided to just wipe them off on his apron and cross his arms in front of his chest. "Good morning! I'm Tobin, what can I do for you?"

Sloane smiled and got right to it, "I am looking to purchase either a staff or scepter that has or can accommodate a setting that can securely fit this stone" she said as she held it up, not wanting to confuse him by calling it a core.

He reached out his hand. "May I?"

She nodded and handed him the core. "Absolutely. Oh, and one more thing, we would need this today as we are trying to resume our journey."

He scratched his beard with one hand as he held the core up and looked over it. "I think I have something that can fit this. Come on in, let's take a look."

Walking inside, they entered a room filled with various armor, weapons, and objects for sale. There was a desk at the back of the room where the boy from earlier was sitting. He had a ledger placed in front of him and his excited face showed he was ready to process any transaction.

Cristole let out an impressed whistle, "This is a lot more than I expected in a small town."

Tobin chuckled and looked over his shoulder to Sloane, "You'd be surprised at how often I get that. Now, I don't think I have a scepter or a staff that will accommodate that stone. However, I have something I think will fit. The user, they're another knight?"

Sloane nodded, "Yes, she is the Knight-Medic for the Order's squad here."

She noticed Ismeld giving her an appreciative smile, that Sloane suspected was because of the subtle suggestion that the Order was larger than it actually was.

Tobin smirked, "Perfect, then yes, this will be perfect." he walked over to a case and pulled out a beautiful silver steel mace shaft with an intricate design. Next to it lay a seven-flanged head shaped with complex inundations and projections. It had a conical finial at the tip that capped off an opening to fit a decorative stone or gem which should accommodate the core. Tobin grabbed the head and slotted the core into the slot, Sloane gaped at how perfect it fit, he looked at her, "Would you like the stone polished? It will take me a few hours to complete the forge weld."

Ernald looked between the mace and her, "I know you said we should try without, but that mace is too beautiful for such a rough sphere. You may as well see if it retains its properties after polishing."

Sloane agreed. The mace would be both beautiful and functional as a weapon instead of just a magical focus. "Yes, I concur. Let's do it, Tobin. Could you also sell me supplies to do polishing on my own?"

Tobin showed a toothy smile, "Of course! I have some spare supplies I can add in for free. Will you need a mace frog as well?"

Sloane looked at Cristole, who answered for her. "Yes, we will take one. Thank you."

Tobin nodded, "Very well! Please pay my boy at the counter there and return in say... three hours?"

Sloane and the others thanked Tobin then Ismeld settled up the cost of their order. They stepped out of the blacksmith and started heading back toward the market, Cristole and Ismeld

wished to purchase supplies for the next leg of their journey, which would take two weeks from what Sloane had been told.

Sloane talked about magic and potential ways Maud could utilize her mace while Cristole and Ismeld shopped. Ernald continued their conversation, “So, you think she just needs to focus on pushing her magic into the core and it should amplify the effect?”

Sloane nodded, “Yes, I suspect that is what will occur, or she can instead pull magic from the core to empower her magic.”

Ernald considered her words, “You know, I really do not like just using magic as the word for the action and the substance.”

Sloane agreed, “Yes, I will consider different terminology to define the process. Hopefully, they shall suit your most prodigious mind.”

Ernald chuckled, “Why thank you milady. I shall mention your contributions when I present my research to the Academy.”

Sloane laughed, drawing Ismeld’s attention, “Sloane, if you are done, come. Let’s get you a set of traveling attire and a pack.”

Sloane smiled, unable to help herself she commented, “Girl time shopping for clothes and I don’t have to spend a penny? Count me in.”

Ismeld raised a brow, “I am unaware of what a penny is, but yes, over there. We can find clothing for you in that store.” Pointing at a shop nearby and making toward it.

Sloane looked over at the place she indicated and quickly moved to catch up with the female knight. As they entered, a small bell chimed as the door hit it while opening. Sloane noticed a large variety of clothing, from dresses to tunics and pants. Two steps into the store, one of the shop’s staff walked over and greeted them.

The girl, a raithe, was beautiful with her styled teal hair and violet skin. She was shorter than both Ismeld and Sloane by almost a full head and had a much more slender build as well. She had a gorgeous fanged smile and vivid pink eyes that gleamed as she addressed the two women. “Good day! Welcome to Dashing Tailors! May I assist, miladies?”

Ismeld immediately took the lead, “We need to get a set of traveling clothes for my companion here. A tunic, breeches, some boots, a cloak, and a belt. Some underclothes as well. A hip pouch and a pack she can wear on her back. It needs to be durable and maneuverable in case of any hostilities.”

Sloane couldn't help it, she chuckled, receiving a glare from Ismeld in the process. “Is there a problem?”

Sloane shook her head as she covered her mouth, “No, Ser Ismeld. I just found your no-nonsense approach to clothing endearing.”

She nodded in response, returning her gaze to the raithe girl.

The girl gave them a moment to ensure nothing else needed to be said, then addressed them. “Wonderful! If that's all you need, then we can easily accommodate you! Please, follow me so I can take some measurements.” She looked to Ser Ismeld, who immediately shook her head, clearly not wanting to join them.

Sloane followed her to an open area near a divider she assumed was for her to get dressed behind. “My name is Elisen, may I have the honor of knowing your name, milady?” she asked as she looked at her with expectant eyes.

“My name is Sloane. It is a pleasure to meet you, Elisen. What do you need me to do?”

“Not much! Please just allow me to maneuver you and obtain the measurements I need to ensure we get you clothed properly.”

Sloane nodded and the girl instantly went to work measuring her in every possible way.

“Where did you get your clothing? It's ... *unique*. And *highly* well made.” Elisen asked, her face filled with curiosity as she pulled and prodded Sloane's shirt and pants.

“Oh, I just got them back home. These are common there.” Sloane stated a bit hesitantly.

“Common? H-how?”

“I'm not sure, to be honest. I don't really know how they're made, I just like them. That said, I'm aware it isn't what the people of your nation wear. I'll be happy with whatever you can provide. All of your clothing looks fantastic.” Sloane deflected.

“May I ask where you’re from, milady?”

“I hail from a nation far from here. It’s of no importance.”

Elisen got the hint and stopped asking more questions as she went back to getting the measurements required. In a few short minutes, it seemed Elisen had what she needed, not writing anything down as she did. She showed Sloane to a nearby chair and then made to go gather the items Ismeld had requested.

After about ten minutes, Elisen returned with an armful of clothing. “So, milady, I know the surly knight has some ideas on what you should wear, however, I think I have just the thing for you.”

Sloane grinned, “I’m happy for your initiative Elisen. Let’s see what you have.”

Sloane stood there in front of a mirror looking at the long-sleeved forest green dress she wore that fell to the middle of her shins. It was made of a rugged, medium-weight material with outdoor travel and hiking clearly in mind. She wore a thin short-sleeved undershirt under the dress to be more comfortable due to its fabric type. Looking down, she examined the waist corset which she ensured wasn’t too tight, she didn’t need to run out of breath if running. Below sat a belt that she had a hip satchel attached to and a place to later attach her short sword.

Draped over her shoulders was a blue cloak with a beautifully stitched silver border that came together with a pewter clasp formed in the shape of two dragons. She wore some breeches underneath the dress with a pair of boots sporting hard soles and laces down the front. Her dagger was strapped in a way that hid it within her boot. She loved the outfit and giggled while thinking about how much it would fit in at a fantasy convention back home. Sloane finally felt as if she would stop standing out in a crowd, especially if she hid her ears under the hood of the cloak.

She looked over at Elisen who noted Sloane’s goofy grin. “Like it, do we?”

“I do, thank you. Could I grab my companion to see what she thinks?” She inquired.

“I will go grab her for you, milady.” the raithe girl offered.

Sloane waited for Ismeld to join her, looking around at the various clothing. After a few minutes, she heard some steps and turned to see Elisen and Ismeld walking up to her.

Sloane smiled at Ismeld, “What do you think?”

Ismeld squinted her eyes and crossed her arms, looking her up and down, then nodded. “Turn.”

Sloane huffed a laugh as she slowly turned to allow Ismeld to see the back of her outfit.

“It will do. It is suited for travel. Like what I would have to have worn back home. *Unfortunately.*”

Sloane turned back to face her, “So, you don’t like this style of clothing?”

“No, I worked hard to become a knight just so I didn’t have to wear it anymore. Do you have everything? Did you get a pack?” Ismeld asked, short on details of her past.

Sloane shook her head and looked at Elisen, “May I wear it from here?”

The raithe smiled, “Of course, milady! I am delighted you are happy. I do agree with the lady in the armor, you will need a pack. Now, we have a few that have straps to wear along your back. Let’s look at them and choose one, then we can meet the lady knight in the front to finalize the transaction.”

Ismeld nodded and returned to the front, while Sloane followed Elisen to look for more accessories.

Fifteen minutes later, they finally emerged from the shop. Ser Cristole and Ernard were sitting at a table with empty mugs in front of them as they waited for the women. Cristole looked up as they came out, scrutinizing Sloane’s new look as they walked over. “Wonderful! Lady Sloane, you finally look as if you belong. With that hood up, you can undoubtedly pass as a telv. We could easily walk into any town or city without unnecessary questions as to your origins.”

Ser Ismeld nodded, “While it isn’t what I suggested, it does perform the function intended. One benefit is that it allows you to appear more fittingly for one of your station. So, I believe this will benefit us as well. Especially in the villages.”

Rolling her eyes, Sloane felt the need to add. “You all know I don’t have a station. Especially not here.”

Ser Ernard tilted his head as he looked at her. Waving off her thoughts. "It matters not milady, you have the appearance and intelligence of a noble. I believe I can speak for all of us when I say that it's only time before it's noble in truth. The first step will be to establish some means for yourself." He stopped and took in her appearance again. "However, I must say, you look stunning, milady. Positively breathtaking."

Sloane blushed slightly under the attention. "Thank you, Ser Ernard, now, I believe it is time to retrieve Ser Maud's new weapon and then return to our companions at the inn so that we may venture forth."

Ser Cristole nodded, "You are correct, let us go!"

When they returned to the blacksmith's shop, Tobin was waiting for them. "Welcome back, Sers and Lady. I completed your order." He said as he took out a small box and opened it. Inside lay the fully assembled mace. The polished core was a striking marbled green color that reminded her of malachite. The core glowed with a soft shimmer of green mist that seemed to be just below the surface of it. The color and glow contrasted the engraved steel designs of the mace beautifully. The requested mace frog was placed next to the mace, the leather was dyed black with a steel ring that would hold the mace to Maud's waist.

Tobin looked at the mace and then the knights. "I could tell there is something different about the orb you gave me. It started glowing after the polishing then the mist started swirling after I finished attaching the head of the mace to the shaft. I am not sure what it is, but I know when I should keep my mouth shut."

Sloane nodded, choosing not to respond. She was thoroughly impressed, and when she picked up the mace to examine it, she gasped. Looking toward the knights, she told them, "I can feel it even in the handle. This is going to be perfect." She handed it to Ser Cristole. "Here."

His eyes widened as he held it. "Yes, this will do." Turning to Tobin, he nodded deeply. "Thank you, Master Smith. Your work is excellent and will serve our Sister well. I will endeavor to seek you out for more work if we pass this way in the future."

Tobin returned the nod, "I thank you, milord. Your words bring me joy, and I am deeply honored to be able to provide my craft to ones such as you. And you Lady Sloane, please, if you are passing through again, come see me." He reached onto the counter and grabbed a small

leather pouch. Handing it to her he added, “I have the supplies you requested here. Again, thank you for your patronage.”

Sloane smiled, “Thank you, Tobin! I will definitely come to see you if I am in the area again!”

The group left the blacksmith and headed toward the inn. Sloane was excited to see how Maud liked the new weapon and hopefully, see just how much it would improve her healing magic.

Her eyes widened as she remembered something from her world. Something she should have thought of immediately when considering the magic. She looked over at Ser Ernard, “Ernard! I got it!”

He looked over at her with a tilt of the head, “Got what Lady Sloane?”

“The magic terminology! I know what it’s called.”

He perked up as his interest grew. “Oh? What is it? Something you know from your world?”

She nodded, “Yes, It’s not in our world, but we have a name for it. It’s what gives you the ability to do magic.” She waved her hand around, “or rather, it is what allows magic to happen at all here. My watch can manipulate it to a small degree and can certainly detect it in some manner.”

Both Ser Ismeld and Cristole stopped and focused on her as they started listening as well. Ser Ernard motioned for her to continue.

“The substance that Maud is using for her magic—” Sloane took a deep breath, excitement bubbling as she got a little bit closer to understanding what was happening in the world around her. “is **Mana**.”