**Chapter 28 Cilia and Leda**

We spent three days incorporating Aelyn into our daily training. She seemed deeply motivated to not only impress me but also to outdo Gareth. Unfortunately for Aelyn, other than flexibility, Gareth only took a few hours to surpass her when he committed. I was actually extremely happy that Gareth had someone pushing him so hard. I had failed in that role as his friend.

We were eating dinner on the third full day after Aelyn’s arrival when Callem announced, “Sebastian is here.” Aelyn was puzzled but Gareth and I rushed outside forgetting the meal. I wasn’t sure how Callem knew the skyship was approaching. To me the ship was silent.

All of us were eventually outside to greet the arrivals. It was still amazing for me to see the *Wind Splitter* moving so gracefully without sound. It was a beautiful ship and scored high on my aesthetic scale. After landing the ramp descended and Sebastian walked down the ramp shortly followed by Nisil. A minute passed and then two young women exited the craft as well. The woman on the right was tall, almost six feet (182 cm). She had rich blonde hair pulled back into a ponytail. My focus was on her as they approached. Her eyes were a light brown, almost golden. She had a square build and was obviously well-muscled by her movement. Her hips were narrow and her chest was mostly flat. Her face took away from her potential beauty though. It was hard and she pursed her lips tight. Her eyes, even with their intoxicating golden color, had a fury written into them.

The woman walking next to her was much shorter, maybe 5’5” (165 cm), and her hair was a shiny black. Her skin was dark too, closer to the Mediterranean in color. She was the darkest-skinned person I had met on Skyholme. Her eyes were a dark brown but had a liveliness to them that the other girl lacked. She was also curvy with an ample bosom and hips. She did have an athletic grace to her walk but didn’t strike me as overly athletic from my observations so far.

As they approached we were sizing them up as they were us. Callem and Sebastian had already retreated inside the farmhouse to talk in private, leaving us to introduce ourselves.

“We have six trunks on the ship boys. Bring them to our quarters,” Cilia commanded us. She was the tall one.

Gareth and I looked at each other and then at Aelyn. None of us moved. The smaller young woman spoke next, “Hi! I’m Leda and this is my friend Cilia.” She elbowed the stern blonde young woman. “Perhaps you can give us a tour of the…” she looked around at the small farm, “fields?” She was attempting humor and not making fun of being in the middle of nowhere by her demeanor.

This was not off to a great start and Cilia made it worse, “If you boys are not going to get the trunks you can have the servant girl get them for us.” My temper flared.

“She is no servant, and you will treat her with respect! Aelyn is our friend and you came here to learn, not to boss us around!" I swung to focus on the short girl ignoring the tall one, "Leda we would be happy to give you a tour while Cilia decides how much of a stuck-up bitch she wants to be.” I spoke in a low tone but with inflection. I turned and started to walk away with Gareth and Aelyn following. I could hear the two young women whispering back and forth before they eventually followed us.

The two were quiet as I led them to the clearing where the obstacle courses were. We explained the three different obstacle courses and answered Leda’s questions. Cilia was quiet but still looked like she had a rod shoved up her ass. Leda asked if Gareth was really 12 and actually went into his personal space to squeeze his biceps and grasp his shoulders. He had the body of an athletic adult man and just his youthful face betrayed him as being young. If I met Gareth I would definitely guess him to be at least 17, maybe as old as 19. He flushed as Leda got a little handsy and I caught Cilia rolling her eyes at her friend's forwardness. Leda just got a few handfuls of muscle before separating from Gareth so we could continue the tour.

Our next part of the tour was the part of the stream we used as a bathing spot. This had both women incredulous. No showers like at the academy? We returned to the training yard and the new large drying shed that we had built with Callem. The shed was actually being used to store farm tools right now. Callem had been extremely happy with Edel’s drying work on the tobacco leaves and planned to use her in the future so the shed we worked so hard to build was being repurposed. The old drying shed was now storing training dummies and training weapons. Leda went to the rack with the staves and picked a short one and challenged Gareth to a quick spar. He agreed immediately. As they walked to the center I moved next to Aelyn. Cilia was on the opposite side of us.

“Aelyn what is going through Gareth’s mind,” I asked. She looked at me questionably. “I know what I said not to read people but I am just curious.” She focused on Gareth as he limbered up.

“He is thinking of ways to get behind Leda and pin her with his staff. Ugh, he is going to reciprocate her handsy action and try to cup her breasts.” She said with some disgust. Oh, this was not good. I didn’t think Gareth knew Cilia had been raped and manhandling Leda would ruin his reputation with the two new arrivals.

I yelled, “Hey Gareth it isn’t right that you get the first crack at the newbies. Let me take the first! Come on brother!” I said stressing brother. That was our sign for him to retreat. He looked about to protest but did relent and walked to me handing me the staff. I whispered to Aelyn, “Please tell Gareth what an idiot he is in no polite words.” Aelyn smiled at my request.

I walked to the engagement circle and squared off with Leda. The smirk of superiority on her face made me not want to give her anything easy. In our first engagement, I managed to catch her ankle with my staff and get her down and retreat from her quick recovery sweep with the staff. Her smirk was gone at least and a fiery determination was now firmly in its place. I tuned out the others who were cheering me on and Cilia was cheering her friend on. We had a minute of quick exchanges with neither gaining the upper hand as we sized each other up. She was good with the staff but not that good. I actually felt pretty confident but remained solidly on guard and kept giving her the same opening. When she ran out of patience she finally took it I put her on her back and pinned her to the ground on her back before she could recover. We recovered and she was smiling now. She was enjoying herself even though she was losing. It took me six minutes to get her down again and pin her, this time face down. After that, she relinquished the victory to me.

Leda had smiled but Cilia was not happy. I checked on Gareth and he looked miserable so Aelyn had put him in his place. Cilia spoke, “Grandfather and Callem have been watching us. We should head inside.” I looked and yes they were over by the farmhouse door watching.

We put away the staves and Leda walked next to me. “You are pretty good. But now I am as filthy as are you. Perhaps we should go wash up in the stream?” I looked at her and she was definitely a nymph with a look of lust in her eyes. She was 18 I think and fairly attractive. Eighteen in this world meant she was physically the age of a 20-year-old. If my aether core heartburn wasn’t ever present I was sure my own libido would grow to match Gareth’s at her advances. Fortunately, my aether core had masked my hormonal overdrive so far.

“I am fine but you can go with Aelyn before bed tonight if you forgot where it was,” I cast my cleanliness spell on myself and she gaped at me as the dirt, sweat, and grim melted from me.

“You wasted a slot on that spell? Well, I guess I should say I am a little jealous. And what is that scent?” She moved to get closer to me but I managed to get Aelyn between us before she could sniff me. With Aelyn between us, she focused on the girl. “You are a pretty one. Who commands you here? Callem?”

Aelyn to her credit didn’t miss a step, “The boy who just dominated you in the ring.” I think Leda licked her lips as she was once again eyeing me like a piece of meat.

“Dominated? Yes, I suppose so. Does he dominate you as well?” Her tone was playful.

“No, Storme is extremely respectful, protective and a perfect gentleman,” Aelyn said with complete seriousness. That seemed to shut her up and I noticed Aelyn had said it loud enough for everyone to hear.

We entered the house with Sebastian and Callem. Wynna had set out some snacks. Callem spoke, “Storme go take a walk with Sebastian. We are going to take some time getting to know each other here. And Storme? Nice work with the staff this evening.” He was obviously proud I had bested someone 5 years my senior. I left with Sebastian feeling pretty good about myself.

Sebastian led me up the ramp into his ship. “We can talk freely now Storme. The Wind Splitter has runes that prevent scrying.” We went up the stairs to his office on the ship and sat down in wooden chairs.

“Storme, things are happening in the capital,” He sighed. “Callem said you display a maturity beyond your years. Cilia needs to get out of Skyholme. Her assaulter, Jorl Bricio, is working to corner her. I had to pull her from the naval academy as setting her back a year wasn’t enough to take her out of his sites. I would like both you and Gareth to try and help convince, indirectly of course, that returning to the naval academy is a mistake,” He seemed deflated. “I can't protect her if she chooses to return.”

I was at a loss for words. “What do you need me to do?” was all I could say.

“I was hoping you and your friend could convince her to join the adventurer's academy or perhaps seek adventure in the lowlands. The lowlands may be dangerous but if she persists in the navy…” he paused with a sad look on his face. I concluded that he was disgusted with what the Skyholme navy or the politics were in their current state.

Sebastian stood, “There may be a Sadian attack coming soon. Not a skirmish, but an attack on a large scale. Cilia can not be in the naval academy when it occurs. If she is then she will be assigned at the whim of Bricio family.” My face creased in puzzlement. “Callem has taught you well. The Bricio’s may just be one of the three families but they essentially control all of Skyholme now. They have either married into, have leverage on, or outright bribed enough members of the other two branches to do whatever they please.”

I didn’t know what to say. Sebastian was laying quite a bit on a 12-year-old boy even if Callem thought highly of me. He got some of the vodka and fruit juice and mixed it and sipped before drinking. It was obvious he was getting the courage to do something.

“Best case scenario is the Sadians weaken the Skyholme navy and the military gets a reset and increased funding. The failure would weaken the Bricio’s considerably.” Oh shit, he was talking about treason. Intentionally making the Sadian attack a little more successful than it should be. I could see why he was reluctant to tell me this. He nodded in response to my eyes widening. “Callem was right about you. I can see that.”

He sipped some more of his mixed drink, “Worst case scenario is the Sadians get a foothold on one or more of the islands and we enter a drawn-out war.” Sebastian said. “Your family should be safe. Callem and Wynna said they would protect them and get them to the lowlands if necessary. He will tell you this himself.” I shifted uncomfortably in my seat at the mention of my family. War was unpredictable.

“After talking with Callem I know how exceptional you can be and as a reward for watching out for my granddaughter, I would like to offer you some assistance and a bit of advanced payment in the form of knowledge. I am a bit of a collector of spells and have an extensive library. I wanted to offer you three spells from my collection.” I looked around the room and didn’t see any spell books. “In addition to the spells I have the complete first two years of texts from the mage academy in the capital, 11 textbooks in total on the basics of magic.” Again I looked around and didn’t see anything. “They are in my personal space,” Sebastian grinned.

Sebastian stood and waved his hand and a portal appeared in the wall. Looking inside the archway there was a short hallway with shelves lining both sides. “Impressive, isn’t it? It is a dimensional space connected to my aether core. It is a tier 3 spatial magic spell. It measures 10’ by 10’ by 20’ after five evolutions on my part. I wouldn’t suggest selecting it as one of your spells though. Maybe the tier 1 version of the spell. Using three slots on your aether matrix for the dimensional closet spell this early in your career…” He let it hang for a second like I should know what he meant, but I didn’t. He went in and picked up a bundle of 11 books on a small end table, “these are the textbooks I mentioned. Feel free to pick any three books in here as well. I will advise you as best I can. I don’t have a descendent that is on the path to becoming an archmage so my collection will go to waste. My descendants will probably just sell them all off piecemeal when I die. Maybe they will help you become a powerful archmage who can save Skyholme from the Bricio’s” Sebastian sighed as he stared wistfully at his collection. I didn’t know what to tell the man who appeared defeated.

I walked down the short hallway and looked at the books. A silvery book drew my attention and pulling it out I recognized it. It was the manual for building a Harbinger ship. The one I had seen in Wigand’s shop.

“Ah Storme, that is not a spell book. It was a gift from Braden Torrent. Yes, that Braden Torrent. A sitting member of the Triumvirate for the Torrent family. They are in control of the military branch and have been on the decline for years as the Bricio and Miaden families have squeezed resources and raised prices and lowered military funding in favor of covert operations. They are mostly honorable, well honorable for the nest of corruption that is the capital of Skyhold. Well anyway, I digress you probably don’t want that book though but it is valuable. Here let me show where the pocket space spell is.”

Sebastian went to a shelf and pulled out a book and handed it to me. I opened the book and looked at it. Pocket Space Spell, Tier 1 space magic spell. It created a space that was 2 foot square (61 cm). “It should take you a week or two to imprint this spell as it is fairly simple. The one drawback of these personal dimension space spells is they do take up a small portion of your aether core reducing your available aether. The space is actually nested within your aether core. When you first cast the spell you orient the doorway to your person. Then every time you access the space it appears in the same orientation to your body as when you first cast it. So take that into account when you are able to cast the spell. You can always cancel and recast the spell and no you can not cast multiple iterations of the spell to gain multiple spaces.” Sebastian finished his quick lesson on the spell.

“Can I cast the tier 1 and tier 3 versions of the spell to get multiple spaces then?” I asked.

Sebastian responded, “Unfortunately no. Your aether core can only support one dimensional space. How best to explain,” Sebastian thought for a second before continuing, “Imagine your aether core as a bucket of water. The pocket space is a ball that floats in the liquid within the bucket in three dimensions. If you add another ball and they collide…bad things happen. There are techniques you can learn to fix the balls in place within your core…but that is well down the road in your development. The warnings are in the spell book you hold so pay attention and read it well before casting the spell once you imprint it.”

I thought for a good few minutes before replacing the book and pulling out the personal dimensional closet spellbook that had been next to it on the shelf. This spell on examination started with a 10’ x 10’ x 10’ space (3m x 3m x 3m). Well if I was only going to get one space to store things I should go big. “I think I will take this spell instead. Do you have any spells for defense with a lightning affinity?” I asked.

Sebastion arched an eye but didn’t object to my exchange of dimensional spells, he just nodded. Then Sebastian put his hand to his chin and thought for a moment, “No, I only have a few lightning spells and no defense-oriented spells for lightning. You need a good defense spell?” I nodded to his question. “Ok I have two that might interest you, one is aether shield. It is a tier 2 spell with no affinity and the shield is about a yard (1m) in diameter to start and invisible to anyone without aether sight. It has no affinity like your cleanliness spell which makes it very versatile in its evolutions. It does take a fair amount of aether to maintain which is a negative. I haven’t imprinted it myself. The other is a tier 1 spell called deflect. The deflect spell acts passively and deflects one attack before dissipating but only works against physical attacks. The aether shield is quite rare, a dungeon prize if I remember correctly from deep in the Nightmare Crypt dungeon in the city of Brightstand.” Sebastian was done and retrieved both books for me to look at.

I perused both books and I was definitely taking the aether shield spell after looking at both. The spell book itself had a heavy copper cover with a hydra on the cover which I assumed was the monster the dungeon delvers had to defeat to earn the book. The script was in the common language which was good and the spell forms inside were quite orderly compared to what I had seen so far. “Yes, dungeon spell books are essentially perfect spell forms. They are what all spell forms evolved from but the problem with them is they don’t detail any evolutions in spell books, and you cannot copy these spell books. They also dissolve once the spell within is successfully imprinted for the first time.” Sebastian supplied.

“I will take this one then,” I said and Sebastian smirked as he recognized I had made a good choice.

“Don’t show it to anyone. It is worth quite a massive sum and many people would kill you for it whether to use themselves or sell it. I haven’t used it because I don’t have any space left to imprint spells. I was hoping I could make enough space over the next decade to imprint this very spell but you can make much better use of it than I can and I have lots of other options. And I expect you to protect my granddaughter.” I nodded. “Ok one more choice.” Sebastian said.

I thought about the Harbinger book. I had no aspirations of building a Harbinger ship but having all the runic script for building a skyship… Sebastian seeing my eyes on the silvery-covered tome spoke again, “I think I know a book you may want.” He went to the back of the shelves and pulled out a book. He handed it to me and the cover was an image of the Wind Splitter. I eagerly opened it and it was similar to the Harbinger book but detailed the Wind Splitter construction and runes. It was mostly loose pages neatly placed inside and not in an organized way. “I have been compiling that book myself. That has my copied notes, research, and everything I have found out during my restoration of the Wind Splitter. I was hoping to eventually get a new class of ship into the Skyholme fleet, a fast transport for troops and supplies. I doubt I will have much say in things anytime soon…” He tailed off, clearly disappointed with his role in the Skyholme navy. “I have copies of these notes anyway. If you prefer this over a third spell I am ok with your choice.” I nodded.

“Ok Storme," he motioned me out of his dimensional space. I looked at the massive collection as the entrance disappeared and hoped one day I could match such knowledge in my own space. “I have one other gift for you,” he went to the desk drawer and retrieved a marble. “This is an anti-scrying item. It is also a dungeon-created magical object obtained from a prize chest.” He handed it to me and I took the black marble. “All you need to do is continually channel a minor amount of aether into it and it will prevent anyone from remote viewing you. It has an effective range of about 55 yards (50m). It is actually a gift from Callem. I obtained it at his request. He thinks either you or Gareth may have need of it in the future.” Sebastian sighed for the umpteenth time.

Sebastian led me down and out of the Wind Splitter. The fourteen books were heavy but a prize I was not going to let go. We had spent over two hours inside and as we walked to the farmhouse Sebastian continued, “I wish I had time to mentor you Storme but Callem is certain only bad things would happen if it was known I was tutoring a promising young mage. My last two apprentices were kidnapped by my old family to try and get leverage on me. Yes, they are bad people. If you run into anyone with the Riffolk surname definitely don’t trust them. They control most of the seedy underworld in Skyholme and are heavily connected to the Bricios.” He didn’t say what had happened to his apprentices but the pained look on his face was enough for me to guess.

We entered the house and everyone else was in deep conversation. Cilia still had her hard look and Gareth looked so uncomfortable that I almost laughed. Callem spoke, “Ah good! Sebastian, did you give the boy the bauble you wanted to give him?”

Sebastian laughed, “Yes it just took me a little to find it and he wanted to see the bridge and for me to explain the controls for the Wind Splitter.”

“Well, it is all good we have just been detailing the new training schedule. We are going to focus on unarmed combat for the next few weeks before incorporating sword work.” Callem said. Was that why Gareth was looking miserable and uncomfortable? Callem continued, “Sebastian we will need your skills to expand the bunkhouse. It has been determined it would be best to add a third loft with two beds for Cilia and Leda. Aelyn has apparently taken a rather protective big sister role in regards to Storme.” A look of jealousy was on Gareth’s face and Aelyn had a smirk on hers. I was curious about the extent of the conversation that had occurred. “Boys why don’t you go and get the young woman’s chests on the Wind Splitter while the rest of us go and work on the bunkhouse upgrades.”

Gareth jumped out of his seat and to the door. Aelyn made to follow us but I waved her off. Gareth needed some ego soothing it appeared. We both went up the ship’s ramp and found the crates before I spoke, “Gareth we are brothers, closer than brothers. You never have to fear I would place you second under any circumstances.” Gareth looked at me and he wasn’t wearing his usual grin.

“Storme I have the charisma trait but I can't seem to get any of the girls interested in me! Well maybe that Leda girl but she scares me a bit now. What the hell is wrong with me? Did you know Aelyn can read minds? She berated me for what I was thinking about Leda before we were about to engage with staves.” Gareth had never been so upset before. His hormones must be raging even at 12. Maybe it had something to do with his rapid growth pushing him through puberty.

“Gareth you have nothing to worry about. Aelyn has been abducted and branded by Skyholme and has trouble trusting people. Cilia was sexually assaulted and probably wants nothing to do with men. And Leda... scares me too.” This seemed to make him feel a little better. “You will have absolutely no problem getting as many women as you want in just a few years. Just give it some time.” We started moving the chests in silence.

Inside the bunkhouse, Sebastian was shaping lumber from outside into a new loft. It didn’t flow like water like my metal shaping ability but seemed to warp the wood. The new loft was a cantilever on the far side to give it similar space to the other two lofts. The new loft was similar set up with the furniture. By the time we got all the girls' chests inside Sebastian was done. One of the chests had mattresses and bedding for the wooden bunks in the new loft, I asked Sebastian to put a panel divider between my bed and Aelyn’s. Aelyn nixed that saying there was no reason for Sebastian to waste his aether on such a thing. The look of amusement on Sebastion's and Callem’s faces was not to my liking so I insisted on the upgrade to my loft. Sebastian relented and added a wood panel, stretching a log into the panel, and he added small shelves on each side of the separation panel, expanding the storage for my books. I smiled because it finally felt like I got the win.

Instead of helping Cilia and Leda unpack I went to my loft and started studying. Aelyn was up in the loft shortly after with a plate of food. When I said no food in the loft she just icily said that was the rule for my side of the loft. Her side of the loft had no such rule. She had said it loudly enough that everyone heard. It drew everyone’s eyes to us. I just rolled my eyes at her antics. I never understood women in my past life and had made no progress in this one. I ignored everyone and studied my spellbook for the obfuscate spell and its evolutions. I needed this spell before I could focus on the dimensional closet spell.

I did my aether core exercises and spent two hours spamming my cleanliness spell. It only used up half my aether stores and I was so tempted to make coins but held back with all the new additions to the bunkhouse. Maybe once all the aether lights went out. Everyone else was in their bed and I heard Aelyn whisper to me.

“I am sorry Storme I lied to you.” She was quiet enough that I didn’t think anyone else could hear.

“What about?” I asked sounding unconcerned.

“My read surface thoughts is an ability. I have been using it on the others. Sebastian has some type of shield against it. Callem’s discipline makes him hard to read but the others…” She said sounding sorrowful about her actions.

“What do you want to tell me?” I was overly cautious.

“Cilia is angry. She is angry at everyone around her for what happened to her. She respects Callem and loves her grandfather but she is extremely angry and wants revenge on her attacker. She is associating you and Gareth as being similar to him.” She paused and when I didn’t ask a question she continued, “Leda is in love with Cilia. Everything she does is to protect her. She was trying to draw Gareth’s and your attention to her away from Cilia. Cilia tends to get overly aggressive against men so she was trying to temper her a bit.” Well, Leda's actions made some more sense now.

“And Gareth?” I asked now committed but not really wanting to know the answer.

“He is a typical male. I have read many men in the past and his thoughts are focused on fornication. He thinks a lot about what he has seen farm animals do and that spurs him to think about women in the same way.” That was more information than I needed. Gareth was 12 but was acting like an 18-year-old. I would have to talk to Wynna. Maybe she knew something that could help him. “Wynna is an overprotective mother hen. She is very fond of Callem and you two. She hasn’t made up her mind on me yet though. She asked me if I would let her do a reading on me and I declined.” Another long pause. “Do you want me to let her do a reading?”

I thought for just a moment, “She has a method that allows only you to see the results of a reading. It is up to you but it may help her build trust with you.” I said.

“Ok,” she said. She seemed done but then said, “I haven’t read you again Storme and I never will unless you ask.” That seemed to finish the conversation. I went to sleep with many thoughts having forgotten about making coins. My first thought was how could I make sure Freya and the rest of my family would be safe if the Sadians attacked Titan’s Shield.