

Order of Haven's Hope

Sloane woke to the sound of multiple people laughing. Groggily, she rubbed her eyes and looked around. Maud's cot was gone, likely packed up for the day. She sat up, looking for her phone to see what time it was, only to notice it was gone. She tried to remember if she had it when she arrived but came up blank. She started taking inventory of what she had, her phone, belt, earrings, purse, wallet, and even her buds were all gone. So, that left her watch and her clothes as the only possessions she owned.

Looking at the watch, she noticed it wasn't working and the screen was swirling with a dark purple nebulous material. She took it off and tried examining it but she couldn't figure out what it was, it was as if the screen had been damaged in the transition but was still somehow doing *something*. "That's strange. I don't really have time for this right now. But...wait..." She tapped her head with her fist, thinking for a moment, then continued talking it through to herself, "why would the watch make it if everything else didn't." She racked her brain for the reason, "Okay, so, metal. The watch has minuscule amounts of it in this version. Mainly just the solder and battery. That's the only reason I can think of. Everything else had metal in larger quantities. At least it's a theory." She blinked, "Actually, why am I even talking to myself right now?"

She looked around again and groaned, she needed to get up and make up a plan of action. She could worry about the watch later. She needed to find Gwyn, she needed money. She definitely couldn't rely on the knights for everything, they'd done a lot already and they'd pledged to do more. She didn't want to take advantage of them.

The tent flaps shifted then Sloane saw Maud stick her head in. "Good morning, Sloane! I hope you don't mind, I heard you talking, so I wanted to see if you'd like to get something to eat before leaving. We won't stop really until we get to Valesbeck, so now's the best time. Just some bread and cheese I'm afraid."

Sloane smiled, "Thank you, Maud, that would be lovely. I'm going to freshen up and I'll be right over."

After using the water left behind by Maud to clean up, she headed to the woods to relieve herself. She still felt pretty gross by the time she got back to the camp, but at least she was ready to go. Surprisingly, the knights were nearly packed up and ready to go, too. She looked back to where she came from wondering just how long she was gone. She didn't think she had been gone long enough for almost the entire camp to be cleaned up and stowed. Shaking her head, she mumbled, "Knights, got it."

As she walked up, Ser Gisele turned and lifted her hand in a wave. "Sloane! Good morning, we are about ready to start traveling to Valesbeck. Are you ready? We can ask around there if anyone has seen or heard anything about your daughter. We should arrive by tonight, and we can stay in the inn there."

Looking at the orc-like woman with green skin and short tusks, Sloane realized that she didn't look quite like the orcs she knew of from stories, but more like some type of half-orc. She was actually quite pretty even with her more muscular physique. However, that didn't detract from her looks at all. If anything, it made her even prettier with the way she carried herself with such surety.

Sloane nodded; it was good that they had a plan. "I'm ready Ser Gisele, may I ask if we can get together after we arrive to determine a course of action from there? I am one who likes to have a clear plan of action for a task. Also, if there's anything I can do to help, please let me know. I may not be a knight, but I like to think I can pull my weight. At least until I can find a way to earn some funds."

Gisele smiled, "Glad to hear it! Of course, we will discuss how we go forward. Here, I have a spare sword. You may hold onto it until you can acquire your own." Gisele handed her a sheathed short sword, which for them would probably be a backup blade compared to the greatswords of various looks that they all seemed to prefer except Maud and Ernard. "You can use the straps to attach it to your back, as I see you don't have a belt to attach it to. I know it's a bit awkward, but I'm sure you'll be able to get used to it pretty quickly. Perhaps in Valesbeck, we can find you some clothes. Or, more likely, we will need to wait until we arrive in the city of Thirdghyll."

Sloane slung the straps over her shoulders and tightened the sheath to her so that it didn't shift too much with movement. It was angled so that she could grab it over her right shoulder. A bit of an awkward angle but she would get used to it for now. She looked at the

knights, feeling her eyes tear up a little, “Thank you, all of you. I will repay you for your kindness, and I will strive to not be an undue burden.”

Gisele straightened a bit and the knights all looked between each other. Gisele had a look of... pride? Sloane wasn't entirely sure, perhaps it was something between all of them that she missed.

The only other orkun in the group, Ser Deryk spoke up, “The honor is ours, Lady Sloane. You have given us a worthy cause.”

Nodding, Gisele walked forward and then turned to address the group. “Haven's Hope, let's get going. Ser Maud, Ser Ernard, you two are on the wagon first. Take turns driving and let Sloane sit upfront. The rest of you, let's mount up and head out. Ser Cristole, I want you riding scout. Be on the lookout for any bandits or undesirables. Frankly, be on the lookout for anything strange. Sloane is proof enough that strange times are afoot. Ser Ismeld, you'll be riding rear-guard. Let's move, people.”

Sloane, once again, appreciated the efficiency of the Knights of Haven's Hope. She got up on the bench at the front of the wagon, Ser Ernard, who was driving first, sat beside her. He looked her way as he grabbed the bridle, “Ready, Lady Reinhart?”

She tilted her head, “I am, Ser Ernard, however, you can just call me Sloane. No Lady or last name necessary.”

Ernard chuckled, “It's only proper milady. You are clearly from a privileged household. Perhaps we can discuss the intricacies of your society and etiquette as we travel?”

Sloane let herself show a small smile, “Of course, Ser Ernard, don't think I don't know what you're doing though.” She gently reproached him.

Ernard held a hand over his heart, “Why, me milady? I would never dare attempt to keep your mind off of any past or present events that may burden your heart and soul.” Overplaying the theatrics, his face alight with mirth, he continued. “Why I am but a simple scholar, ever in pursuit of knowledge.” He finished with a melodramatic flourish. Seeing her raised eyebrow, he chuckled and took on a more serious tone, “Perhaps as a first topic, you could explain what it is that you wear upon your wrist?” inclining his head toward her watch as he spoke.

Sloane smiled, letting him distract her from her thoughts as the wagon started to move down the road. “Of course, Ser Ernard, this” she held up her wrist so he could look at the watch, “is a watch, that is, it is a device that allows me to track the time of day, check the weather forecast, track my heart rate and distance traveled, maintain a schedule of appointments, make payments, and many other useful functions.”

Ser Ernard’s brows scrunched up in thought. “You can do all of those things, in that little piece of glass and strap? How?”

Sloane frowned a bit, “Well, for now, the watch is currently not working. Something to do with how I arrived here I suspect.” She perked up a bit, thinking about the difference in technology in their respective societies, “But, Ser Ernard, let me tell you all about the wonders of electricity and silicone. I do believe we have plenty of time.”

She proceeded to regale the dark-skinned elf over the next few hours with the history of electricity and various inventions and uses for it. He was highly inquisitive and insatiable in his desire for more knowledge. He asked so many questions, things she took for granted. She chuckled thinking about it, like how do you catch the lightning to use it for all of the devices. She enjoyed the conversation, and she would admit that it did distract her.

She looked around at the knights, they were good people, it didn’t matter that they weren’t human. They dropped everything to help her. She wasn’t sure how long they would remain with her, but she knew that she had gotten lucky. She had essentially zero knowledge of this world; she needed allies. She thought that an Order of Knights would be a great first choice, even if they were, as she suspected, either exiled or sole survivors of some catastrophe. Their past didn’t matter, she would work with them if they helped her find Gwyn. Any knowledge exchange she could facilitate would be extremely beneficial to her.

Eventually, Maud traded spots with Ernard. The kind half-elf, or *telv* as they were called, was happy to sit and talk to her about her chosen profession of healing. Taking in her appearance as she started talking, Ser Maud was about a head shorter than Sloane and had long curly, copper-colored hair. One look into her vibrant green eyes, coupled with Maud’s excitement and sunny demeanor was enough to take one in completely. Sloane wasn’t extremely knowledgeable in medical sciences or biology, but she had a basic understanding that she believed far surpassed a medieval society. She sat patiently, listening to Maud’s interesting personal story.

“So, once I completed my surgeon apprenticeship, I joined the Knight Order of Havensway in a support role. However, as time went on, I joined my fellow Knights more and more in their martial training. Eventually, Knight-Captain Gisele sponsored me before the Order Commander. It took another two years of training and schooling, but eventually, I was dubbed a Knight by the local lord at the behest of the Commander. I have been a Knight-Surgeon for eight years now.”

“Wow. That is a lot more in-depth than I had imagined. So, the six of you are far from home now?”

Maud got a far-off look in her eye, nodding, she said, “Yes, we hail from the Island Kingdom of Blightwych. We were a small order of knights, and we had a compound that acted as our headquarters near the coast. Our...” she paused, composing herself, before continuing. “Our order was called upon to defend our port town of Havensway from a large group of Ve’rokan Raiders from the southeast. From a nation whose ambition should have been checked by our Kingdom’s pact with the Lymtoria Republic.” Sloane noticed Maud’s fists clenched so hard her knuckles started turning white. Sloane waited, not wanting to interrupt her thoughts, it was undoubtedly a difficult topic for Maud.

Maud briefly closed her eyes then reopened and spoke, “The raiders were well informed. Havensway was never meant to stop a coastal raid that may as well have been an invasion. The raiders numbered nearly a thousand. Our order had less than two hundred, including support personnel. The town guard combined with the small guard the local lord kept for his own manor as we attempted to hold off the raiders. Our order made a stand to hold a breach at the eastern wall of the palisade. We fought over three times our number in just that part of the fight and, in the end, we successfully managed to force them back to their boats and retreat, but not without cost. Our Knight-Commander, dead, felled while personally holding off ten men. Our order was shattered. Of the seventy knights there, less than twenty survived. The others wanted to stay and join the lord as they had families they did not wish to leave behind. The support personnel either moved on or joined the town as well.

The six of us formed the Order of Haven’s Hope as a reminder to our fallen brothers and sisters. We have been looking for a cause to not just help others, but to help ourselves. To regain our honor and pride. While it may not seem like a cause that requires six knights to any outsiders, we understand your search for your daughter is *everything* for you. This resonates with us. Family. We all lost people that day. People we knew for years, that we grew up with. We

will help you find Gwyn, Sloane, and maybe... maybe somewhere along the journey, we will find ourselves again too.”

She started tearing up, taking slow, deep breaths; Sloane reached over and put her hand on Maud’s shoulder. “Thank you, Maud. I know we have barely known each other for a day, but I think you and your fellow Knights are some of the most honorable people I have ever met. I’m sorry that I brought up such traumatic thoughts for you.”

Maud nodded, “It felt good to say it aloud.”

They fell into a contemplative silence. Eventually, Maud thanked Sloane for the discussion and switched places with Ser Ernald.