**Chapter 34 Aelyn**

Aelyn was feeling only slightly better after the last few days. When the Skyholme Inquisitors came for her mother she was furious and tried to defend her. Even as her mother told her not to interfere she fought with everything she had. The Inquisitor's hybrid wolfmen tried to subdue her and she managed to wound two of them before being restrained herself. The Inquisitor looked her over before ordering his men to take her with her mother in case she was a spy as well.

In custody, they had to wait an entire day before being questioned. The carnival proprietors had made endless efforts to get back their abducted members. They ultimately failed and were forced to pack up and depart with their massive airship.

Aelyn and her mother, Niserie, were questioned in front of each other by a Truthseeker. Niserie was first and looking into her daughter’s eyes shedding tears as she was forced to answer questions. Aelyn was close to her mother. Aelyn had moved out of their cabin three years ago but they had breakfast together every morning and talked.

She had known her mother acted as an intermediary for some type of information network and sometimes did some freelance work as well. The Truthseeker had a powerful item that caused Niserie’s eyes and ears to bleed when she resisted answering. She was proud of her mother as she hadn’t screamed through the obvious pain. It was when they threatened to turn the device on Aelyn that Niserie relented to the item's pressures. Niserie said she was part of the *Hand of Crimson Moonride*rs. They were an information network for one of the powerful beings that lived on one of the 23 planets orbiting inside the sphere. This initially scared the Truthseeker until they realized how minor a member she was in the organization. Niserie then revealed that she was doing a freelance mission. She was to pick up documents from certain individuals who worked in the Skyhold Fortress. She was to bring those documents to a Sadian contact in the lowlands. She didn’t have the names of the people just excellent descriptions of each of them. This made it easy for the Inquisitor to identify them.

After exhausting their questions they turned the device on Aelyn. Her mother told her not to resist and just answer their questions. The questions revealed nothing other than a few embarrassing facts to her mother about her dalliances with young men. There had been seven young men in the cities they had visited in the last two years. Thankfully the Inquisitor didn’t ask for more details other than confirming Aelyn just had sex with them and had not been involved in any spying or espionage. Her mother sobbed as her daughter was exposed so callously in front of the Truthseeker. She would never forget that man, Lytham Bricio. She read the man’s surface thoughts and this man was wicked, malicious, and devious all rolled into one.

It took a few days before Aelyn was separated from her mother and sentenced to life in servitude. Her mother told her to forget about her and live her best life. Aelyn knew her mother was lost to her.

The process of being branded was painful and the mage cast a spell to link the brand to a magical ring. He was one of the foulest men she had ever met. Reading his mind revealed the depravities he was thinking of doing to her. It almost made her vomit right there. He had directly asked Lytham if he could take Aelyn as a prize after the spell was completed but Lytham said no. It was the only kindness Lytham had done for her. But then Lytham added if they no longer found a use for the mother then he could have the girl. It made Aelyn sick thinking of a possible fate with the insidious mage.

Aelyn spent days trying to be broken by her handlers. Thankfully she was not raped just beaten when she refused to do what was asked of her like cleaning toilets, scrubbing floors, washing clothes, and preparing food. She had been trotted out in front of a few people like a prize pig when they tried to sell. No one purchased her at the ridiculous price they had asked. That was until a young man came.

 The boy looked like a young warrior. She didn’t think much about the encounter as the sum for her was so exorbitant. But the boy returned later with the funds in full. She made the effort to read his thoughts. The boy was thinking of what Aelyn looked like naked and what her skin would feel like under his hands…and kissing her lips. She stopped reading him. This boy was no better than Lytham and the mage who branded her. To this boy, she was just an object to be used.

The boy tried to play innocent as he took her home. He said he was freeing her. She told him she was life bound by the brand and could never be freed. She explained the brand to him but she knew the boy was pretending ignorance of the brand. Why else would he spend so much on her? Then the boy made the mistake of commanding her to speak her mind. She laid into him so hard that he shrunk away and drew eyes from passersby. The skyship ride back to his island was in silence. The walk back to his ‘secret training farm’ didn’t go well as he tried repeatedly to quell her concerns. Aelyn didn’t need to read his thoughts to know he wanted her.

Things started to change at the farm as Aelyn was introduced to the other players in her new captivity. She tried to read everyone's thoughts, but the large man was virtually unreadable. This occurred when someone’s will outstripped her ability. The older woman was concerned for Aelyn’s well-being. And the other boy…he was just focused on his spells and worried about how badly his friend, Gareth, had screwed up.

This the other boy, Storme, made coins out of nothing. Real actual coins! Aelyn’s mind was churning. If she could get this boy to take the ring and then befriend him? She might even be able to influence him to take her away from these devil-infested floating islands. He wasn’t ugly either… Maybe in time, he would free her as well but she didn’t hold out much hope in that.

It didn’t take much to get Storme to wear her control ring. The old man seemed to think it was the best course of action. With the ring, Storme could force her to do pretty much anything. He would also always know where she was. She was confident in her ability to win him over. Anytime in the past when she set her mind to something she always succeeded.

After a few days, things got better for Aelyn as the boy definitely wasn’t planning to take advantage of her. Maybe he preferred other boys? Or maybe he was just too young to be interested? But she was also now in an environment where she could improve and she would take full advantage of it! It was actually fun competing with the big boy, Gareth. How the hell was he only 12? He was an exceptional athlete and swordsman. Aelyn actually thought it might not have been so bad if Gareth had worn the ring. With him being 12 she could have controlled him much easier than Storme as he was constantly thinking about women. Storme was much more resistant or perhaps ignorant of her charms.

The arrival of the other two girls caused some consternation for Aelyn. She didn’t want anyone interfering with her attempts to befriend Storme. Storme was a masterpiece in her mind, with unlimited wealth, a competent healer and a great cook rolled into one! He also wasn’t too bad looking.

Aelyn wasn’t sure why she told Storme to move over to Gareth’s loft. She had Storme where she wanted him, close and slowly breaking down his barriers. But she saw the boy's friendship starting to strain and Storme was completely ignorant that he was pushing his friend away! For some reason, she pushed them back together. She probably could have moved into the space voided by Gareth but she found she liked Storme too much to do something like that.

She found a golden opportunity to get closer to Storme when Storme encouraged her to get a reading. Aelyn had been shocked by her reading from Wynna and Ennet. The readers at the carnival were not strong and somewhat imperfect. From the carnies, she knew two of her abilities; Read Thoughts ability at Tier 2 and Nimbleness at Tier 1.

Wynna and Ennet on the other hand read her entire aether soul.

**Abilities**

Read Thoughts, Tier 2

Nimbleness, Tier 1

Duelist,Tier 1

Enhanced Mobility, Tier 1

Persuasion, Tier 1

**Traits**

Improved Sight, Tier 1

Long-lived, Tier 2

**Skill Affinities**

Acrobatics, Tier 3

Long Bow, Tier 2

Seduction, Tier 1

**Aether Matrix**

Current 5

Maximum 8

**Aether Core**

Current 10

Maximum 32

She couldn’t show Storme this list. If he saw them he might think she was manipulating him with her abilities. In truth, she was but not with malicious intent. She needed to ‘lesson’ the reading a bit. She definitely couldn’t show him the persuasion ability or the seduction affinity. Aelyn was actually puzzled about her array of skill affinities. Just exactly what was she in her past life or lives to have these skill affinities? Not something to dwell on at this time... Also she should maybe lower her aether scores a little bit as well to reduce her profile.

It had taken Aelyn a few days to get a similar sheet of paper so she could copy over her reading with some slight changes. She felt weird about writing out the text in her own blood but wanted it to match in script and color. She was hoping to show Storme her reading. This would help him trust her more. When the sheet was finished and she looked at it.

**Abilities**

Read Thoughts, Tier 2

Nimbleness, Tier 1

Duelist,Tier 1

Enhanced Mobility, Tier 1

**Traits**

Improved Sight, Tier 1

Long-lived, Tier 2

**Skill Affinities**

Acrobatics, Tier 3

Long Bow, Tier 2

**Aether Matrix**

Current 3

Maximum 6

**Aether Core**

Current 6

Maximum 19

Aelyn hadn’t really thought herself a mage. She knew her core had awakened and sometime in the future, she planned to learn a spell of two but never had the time. She did use her aether to use her read thoughts ability so she was used to drawing on her core.

She found the right time to approach Storme on a day off. She climbed into his loft bed with him while everyone else was gone. She asked him to help her with spellcraft and he immediately assisted, giving her his own textbook and promising her spells. Getting in his bunk space didn’t really go quite as planned as he seemed a little afraid of her closeness and somehow managed to ignore her as they sat face to face knees touching. She was tempted to read his thoughts but held back. This actually surprised her a bit. Was the boy winning her over?

When the others returned the encounter was ruined. However, Aelyn felt she had made progress. She had come into his private space, his bed, and not been rejected outright. She wasn’t trying to seduce him. She just wanted him to be very comfortable with her presence.

The training the next few days was intense and Aelyn felt she was making gains on Gareth which was pushing Gareth even harder to keep his margin. Storme had sort of checked out of training and was focusing on his spells. This made Aelyn work on her own aether core development at night as it was another possible avenue to getting closer to Storme, getting Storme to be her magic teacher. The two women, Cilia and Leda, had started talking to Aelyn more as they trained together. They all bathed every night together and she didn’t dislike either one. She was slightly worried the Leda girl might seduce Storme out from under her. That girl held very few inhibitions.

On the morning that Callem and Storme were headed into town Aelyn had wanted to join them but had been rejected. This hurt her feelings a little bit but she decided she would take out her frustrations on the others during training. Training that day was extremely intense from everyone. It was only broken up by a large shipment of meats that had arrived during the day. Everyone had worked together to bring the meat to the basement larders. Callem wasn’t there to temper and control the interactions among them and things got out of control and heated. Leda’s minor healing skills were not enough and everyone was anticipating Storme’s return and his healing wave.

The worst part of the day was the food. Wynna had tried to prepare a good lunch and dinner but something was missing with Storme not being present. Everyone felt it. It was not that the food tasted bad…it was his presence that somehow cemented them all together.

It was Gareth who jumped up first from the plush couch. They had been discussing the uniforms of the soldiers in the lowlands and Gareth rushed outside without saying a word. Everyone soon followed and found Callem pulling a large cart laden with chickens and packages. Aelyn found herself smiling and grinning unbidden at Storme’s appearance walking next to Callem.