**Chapter 47 (Arc 2 Chapter 1) The New Class**

**I had to put up with Gareth constantly bragging about his meal at the estate of the magistrate. What hurt the most is her claim the food was as good as mine. The magistrate even offered to sponsor Gareth to the Naval Academy in the capital city. During the meal, he was seated next to his youngest daughter. She was almost thirty but Gareth professed she was pretty...and single. I was glad Gareth was getting his just recognition but his head was getting too big and I was having trouble containing it.**

**In the two weeks leading up to the start of the academy, I made some progress on learning the *lightning reflexes* spell. I was hiding the spellbook from Gareth as I wanted to surprise him when I finally learned it. It was not an easy spell to learn. I had no idea how long it would take but there was good news. The spell made sense. It was partly from being a dungeon spellbook and the fact I had affinities for both lightning and healing, the aspects of this spell. The spell was pretty insane when I looked at it. It increased movement speed by around 50% at the cost of one aether per second. Being a dungeon spell there were no upgrade tracks in the book but I was already puzzling some things out. Reducing the casting cast and increasing the speed seemed the obvious ones.**

**I had a few other spell advancements. My obfuscate spell reached level 5 and I choose to edit my healing and lightning affinities. I had both showing just tier 1 now. Hiding my tier 4 healing affinity and tier 2 affinity for lightning.**

**My dimensional closet hit level 6 because I had been using the exchange property of the spell liberally. At level 5 I confirmed that space was increasing at a rate equal to my aether core growth so it made sense to increase the depth of the space by 2’ for the evolution. With my core growth, this would translate to more than 3’ of growth when my core fully matured. I planned to reach level 7 as soon as possible to extend the space again to take advantage of the bonus growth from my greater aether core.**

**At level 3 my alarm spell I selected the silent alarm option. This evolution allowed me to tag up to three people who would hear the alarm go off in their heads, making no sound.**

**Of course, in the two weeks after Gareth won the tournament Callem also put up to work to get barracks ready for everyone coming. I didn’t voice it but found it irritating that not only was I paying for the upgrades but I was also doing the physical labor of painting and setting up furniture. Gareth for his part was ‘reserving’ the larger room across the hall for Mera and Fera. I didn’t know if there were going to be assigned rooms but I would be adamant to take this larger room since I was footing the bill.**

**We were not the only ones helping to get the improved facility ready. Pascal and his group of friends were clearing bushes to extend the practice yard and expand the already daunting obstacles. One thing I did manage to get was upgrades to Gareth and my room. This included nicer furniture, better mattresses, and nice linens. Gareth asked I ‘upgrade’ the mattresses across the hall and their linens as well. This cost me just under a large gold but I liked the twins so paid with little fuss.**

**When the day finally came it was like sending off your children to college in my old. Callem was the only instructor here as parents sent their kids off for a year of instruction. Each new student brought a large pack of clothes. Some brought weapons and armor. The one theme persistent with everyone coming was the incoming students were here to learn how to defend themselves and possibly get into an advanced academy for a career path.**

**If Callem kept the same structure as past academies then we would spend half the day training, the afternoon in classes, and have our evenings free to socialize. The age of 14 was considered the adult age in Skyholme. This meant we were not going to have any of the teachers living at the barracks. So the first-year academy not only taught you to fight but how to develop long-term relationships and possibly find your future husband or wife.**

**As soon as Mera and Fera showed up Gareth and I moved into their room to socialize. Gareth did most of the talking and I just lounged on the bed while the twins unpacked their clothes. I was playing with the spell forms in my head for the *lightning reflexes* spell so I was distracted. “Storme. Storme.” Mera had been trying to get my attention and she succeeded.**

**“Sorry I was working on imprinting a new spell,” I said. Her interest was piqued.**

**“What spell Storme!” She sat next to me on her bed. Gareth and Fera had left the room, leaving us alone.**

**“Well, it is a secret so you can't tell Gareth.” She nodded. “It isn’t that impressive of a spell,” I said downplaying it. “It just makes me faster for a short time. Hopefully enough to defeat Gareth in a spar.”**

**“We went to see you fight in the qualifiers. You were amazing. We had to promise father quite a bit of extra work on the farm to go to the second day but it was worth it! You are amazing! Am I going to be able to fight like you after the academy?” She asked while looking into my eyes. Was she about to lean in?**

**“If you work hard enough you can. It will take a lot of investment on your part,” I said supportively and ignored her closeness.**

**Mera grabbed hold of my arm, “Will you help me?”**

**Realization dawned on me. This was a trap to get me to spend more time with her. It wouldn’t be a bad thing but it would take a lot of my time. I ran through the possibilities and decided, “Gareth is a much better fighter and teacher than me.” A mask of disappointment was on Mera’s face. “Magic is really my thing if you wanted to learn magic I could help.” I tried to salvage the conversation.**

**Mera looked somewhat sad, “I do have a very small aether core as does my sister but it the difficulty to learn magic…”**

**I was torn as to what I should invest in this relationship with Mera pushing so hard. We were both close to age 15 physically but in reality, I had foggy memories from a past life. I hadn’t planned to be in any type of romance until I was at least age 16. Mera was attractive in a tomboy kind of way and she had a great smile. “Callem is having a magic instructor coming to teach at the academy. I am sure if you have an aether core, no matter how small you could learn from her.”**

**Slowly her eyes brightened, “I could learn magic? Fera too?”**

**“Definitely. It just takes time. We should find out tonight at dinner about classes and such.” I said. I cast my *cleanliness* spell. The smell of vanilla hit her and she looked at me in question, “Magic,” was all I said and she giggled.**

**Our conversation turned to more mundane topics as we talked about the other students. Twenty-eight was quite the number. Gareth and Fera returned with Gareth looking like the cat that got the canary. Fera also had puffy lips…so they had been kissing. I looked at Mera next to me and she looked away embarrassed. I think she was supposed to kiss me while they were gone.**

**With Gareth and her sister in the room, she lost confidence and soon the conversation went to speculation as to what would happen at the dinner. I doubted there would be any sorting hats.**

**The dinner was catered from the tavern and plates of food were on the table with pitchers of water. I knew the pantry below the kitchen was now mostly stocked as Gareth and I had spent a few days carrying down the barrels and meats. The fact that I did not see any cooks had me extremely worried. The tables were positioned so one head table faced the others. Callem and Aelyn were sitting there with a middle-aged man. Callem stood once everyone was sitting. Some people were already picking at the food before them.**

**“Welcome!” Callem’s command voice rang through the room. “This will be your first year of the academy and I, Callem Dregalla, will be your Head Instructor.” The room broke into chatter as everyone was obviously excited. I could see Mia sitting two tables away grinning.**

**“We will be doing things slightly differently than past academies in Hen’s Hollow. The year will be divided into three terms. For the first term at dawn break, we will start with two hours of conditioning administered by Aelyn Imiduis,” He pointed to Aelyn at the table with him. Her cold look gave me the chills. She was looking forward to this. “If anyone one of you attempts to order her around based on her mark then she has permission to beat some sense into you,” Aelyn smirked. I held Aelyn’s ring so technically I was the only one who could order her but Callem made it seem he was, in fact, the holder of Aelyn’s contract.**

**“After conditioning will follow breakfast. Breakfast will be prepared by local women and girls in town so treat them with the respect they deserve and don’t complain about the food.” Relief flooded through me as I wouldn’t have to cook. “After breakfast, you will be broken into four groups for classroom instruction based on your needs. The classrooms will be for 3 hours in the subjects of reading/writing, mathematics, dungeon delving, and spellcraft. For spellcraft, you need to have an awakened aether core.” There was a lot of buzzing going on now. I don’t think there had ever been spellcraft taught in Hen’s Hollow. Typically 1 in 10 people had an awakened core. With the twins having small cores the math said at most just one other person in this room would be able to cast spells. But I would have to wait and see.**

**Callem continued, “After morning classes will have lunch followed by weapons training. We have four weapons masters. Aelyn here is a master of the rapier, instructor Elora is a master of the staff, Elijah Habriel is a master of the axe and I will cover the remaining weapon classes.” Murmurs of awe rang through the dining hall. I thought calling Aelyn a rapier master was a bit of a stretch. Was Elijah the monster hunter Callem had talked about? He hadn’t mentioned whether he was successful in tracking him down.**

**Callem raised his hands to quiet the crowd, “After weapons training, you will all be bathing in the town bathhouse before evening classes.” Callem looked at me and grinned knowing I would have a free one-hour block of time while everyone else rushed to the bathhouse. “Evening classes will be your choice of artificing, history, herbalism, or monster hunting.” It was clear that Callem had recruited Sana Velin and Aldon Aethon to be my teachers. For Gareth, he recruited Elora Cassior and Elijah Habriel.**

**“Following classes will be dinner. After dinner, you will be lectured for one hour on Skyholme law and politics,” Callem finished. The last was a requirement in order for the first-year academies to get funding from the Triumverate. There was a lot of buzz at the tables at the schedule.**

**Callem raised his hands again to silence everyone, “This is instructor Aldon Aethon,” he indicted the middle-aged man. He will be teaching history and artificing. “The other three instructors will be introduced at breakfast tomorrow.” Callem grinned widely, the old man seemingly full of energy. “Also I almost forgot! In order for you to select which classes you wish to take we have the esteemed readers, Wynna and Ennet, here to give each of you a private reading.” We all turned to see the women in the doorway. Callem’s voice boomed, “Do not share your results with anyone! If you need help selecting your two classes then talk to either me or Aldon this evening.”**

**Every student here would have been too poor to afford such a reading normally. Callem was going all out. Even though he obviously was doing this for our benefit he was going to do his best to prepare the remaining students as well.**

**“One final announcement!” Callem bellowed again. “Normally you would have every seventh day off but not this week.” The students went quiet. “This seventh day there will be a field trip to the capital to watch two of your classmates compete in the first two rounds of the pre-academy Annuals!” The apprehension about losing a day went to cheers. I didn’t think any of these students had ever been to the capital before. I knew the town had rented an entire skyship to go watch us compete. So Callem must have reserved seats for everyone in the academy.**

**While the excitement raged around us I ran through the entire schedule in my mind. Damn Callem. If you added up the time we were not going to have any time in the evening to do anything but sleep! Which was perhaps the point. But I needed to study my spells and learning how to be a good enchanter was also a priority for me.**

**As things quieted down the line to get a reading started to form and Gareth and I retreated to our room. Since the twins already had a reading recently they left the dining hall with us. They joined us in our room. Mera said, “Why is your furniture so nice!!” She was going around and exploring every nook. “Storme, why is your side of the room so bare? I thought you were living here for the last two weeks?”**

**Gareth answered her, “Storme purchased us nicer furniture and mattresses. I convinced him to get the same mattresses for your room.” Gareth was taking credit for the mattresses? Why not just scream from the mountain top that I was spending gold like water?**

**Mera and Fera thanked Gareth instead of me…and I was slightly jealous. “So Storme,” Mera started, “Where are all your spell books? I thought you were a mage. And you said you were working on a new spell?” My side of the room was quite bare since I stored pretty much everything in my dimensional closet.**

**I didn’t plan to leave my spellbook laying around because I didn’t want Gareth to see the spell. “Everything I need is in my trunk,” I indicated the closed trunk at the foot of my bed that was locked and actually empty.**

**“Oh,” Mera sounded slightly disappointed. “Can you clean our room with your vanilla spell? Maybe we could do you favors for keeping it clean,” she suggested.**

**“Sure,” I committed to the simple request. My range was at 18” so it just took walking around the room and casting the spell a dozen or so times. She smiled at me. Excited students kept coming back from the dining hall area. The twins and Gareth started getting into a conversation about what weapon would be best for each of them. I really wanted to study my spell but didn’t want to bring the book out. I lay down and focused on my dimensional space. I found the book quickly and tried something new.**

**I tried to manipulate the book on the shelf, changing its orientation and opening to the page I wanted to study. I minor drain of my aether and the book was on the desk… I got excited. It took about 30 minutes before I could get the book open to the correct page. Then I focused close to the page, like zooming in. It was a success. I could see everything clearly and study the spell this way! The only drawback was not aware of the things happening around me in the real world. I could hear muffled conversations but that was it.**

**I don’t know how long I spent studying the spell but when I returned to awareness the twins were gone and Gareth was on his bed reading one of his dungeon books with a light stone.**

**“Back with us Storme?” Gareth asked. “You know I think Mera really likes you. You should make more of an effort with her,” she said off handily.**

**“I know.” I decided to be a little honest with my best friend. I whispered, “You know my past life knowledge. Well, it makes me feel a bit older and she is so young…” I confided in him.**

**Gareth rolled over to look at me, “Storme but by the time the first-year academy is over most everyone here will have had sex. Fera has already asked me to be her first.” I thought about his statement. My aether core burning had muffled my sexual awakening in this life. Since people matured physically so much faster in the sphere I guess I shouldn’t be surprised. “Maybe it's best you don’t have sex with anyone Storme,” Gareth said. “You might hurt them with that oversized weapon of yours between your legs.” I threw a pillow at him which he caught and added to his collection.**

**I was definitely going to have to figure out how I was going to approach relationships. I lay down, using my one remaining pillow. I liked Mera. I liked Aelyn…and Aelyn was 18…basically an adult in either world. But there was her indentured mark. I couldn’t ask or approach the subject with her until we got it removed.**