

## **It Would Be Fine They Said**

Sloane and the knights had arrived in Thirdghyll without much fanfare. The rest of the trip had been uneventful and filled with downtime. Five days that Sloane had filled with working on various designs of things to create. Most were fanciful, however, there were a few she felt had immediate benefit. One, she felt was very important for her travels.

She had even started working on a few. She had a couple of small hollowed-out spheres that could unscrew into two halves so she could put something inside. Sloane had ideas of what to do with those...

Sloane had considered everything she would need while traveling alone. She had thought about the wolves, and Sloane knew that she would need tools to be able to fight such things solo. She would also need to find a way to track objects or mana in general.

*It's amazing how much you can get done when you don't have any modern distractions.*

Right now, she could sense mana through her watch, but that only went so far. She wasn't sure what it was, but it was as if Mana only existed when a person used it. It flew in the face of everything she thought she knew. Which, admittedly, was only fantasy. Real life had different rules that dictated such processes.

She was sitting on her bed going over the current plan to reach the Kingdom of Avira and its academy that would hopefully give her insight into finding Gwyn. The travel would be long and hazardous. Gisele had reassured her that going by sea would take months off of the time required and be immeasurably safer. She wasn't sure of the conditions but from what she was told, going by land would take at least half a year.

However, that didn't account for the fact that Sloane would have to hole up somewhere for the winter that would arrive in a couple of months.

Based on some quick math, it should only take her roughly two to three weeks to travel by boat to Maireharbora. Then she would travel north to Anerval then on to Smoulderfall at which she would need to stay for the winter.

Sloane sighed.

*Hopefully, Gwyn has somewhere safe to stay. I wonder what she is doing now?*

Sloane placed her quill down as she tried to lock up the thoughts and emotions that threatened to rear their ugly face. Every time she thought about Gwyn and finding her, Sloane nearly had a panic attack. There was just so much space to cover and she could be *anywhere*. She really didn't know what to expect from going to Avira, but it was the *only* potential lead she had.

She went to sleep and dreamed of exploring the world with Gwyn, and the magic she would teach her.

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Sloane groggily walked down to the inn's dining area, not quite ready for the day. She entered and looked around at the tables, looking amongst all of the various people for the six she knew. She saw Ismeld and Gisele at a table along the wall and walked to them.

Ismeld looked up from her drink and gave her a nod.

The orkun knight at least addressed her, "Good morning, Sloane. Please, join us."

"Thank you, Ser Gisele. Good morning, and to you Ser Ismeld," She said as she sat down.

"Yeah," Ismeld responded curtly.

"Ismeld here didn't sleep well. There was a family in the room next to hers. The infant was awake, wailing all night."

Sloane gave a sympathetic nod. "Trust me, I understand that. Even though I've been there myself, I still find that I don't like it when babies can't be consoled. Especially on a plane."

Sloane leaned back so the barmaid could place a plate of food down for her. Sloane asked her for a drink and started to pick at her bread and cheese.

Ismeld scrutinized her. “So, What’s a plane?”

Sloane squinted trying to recall. “Didn’t I already explain them?”

Gisele chuckled. “You’ve explained a lot Sloane, but that one may have been to Maud or Ernard. Your wagon-friends. The three of you definitely have a different relationship than the rest of us.”

Sloane smirked at Gisele. “Hmm. Maybe. We three have to stick together. We can’t all go gallivanting around on our horses with no care in the world. Some of us have to do the hard work.

“Buuuuuut...” She headed off any chance of retort. “A plane. It’s a metal vehicle with wings that utilizes physics and technology to fly. I explained automobiles, right?”

The two knights nodded so she continued, “Okay, so this is probably not one hundred percent accurate but I explained how a car engine works. Fundamentals, at least.

“Now, imagine using a type of engine to pull in air and mix it with combustible fuel—like how your lamps use oil to maintain a fire. Burn this fuel to create a discharge of heated air and exhaust that pushes the plane forward. The wings it has do not flap like a bird, they are there to stabilize and provide lift which allows them to stay in the air even though they are heavy. I can explain aerospace engineering and the physics that allows for it another time.”

Ismeld squinted in thought. “So, the purpose of these planes is to travel like a wagon?”

“Exactly! We use them to travel all over the world in hours rather than days, weeks, or months. Planes can be small and have only one person fly in them, or they may be large and have over eight hundred.”

Gisele's eyes opened in astonishment. “Eight... Hundred? That’s incredible. Your people traveled by these often?”

Sloane nodded. “All the time. I regularly traveled for my work so there were times when I would have ten to twenty flights in a month. Sometimes flying over nine thousand kilometers for business.”

Ismeld just shook her head. “I don’t think I will ever get used to your stories from your world.”

“I agree. They boggle the mind. But, I admit that the idea of flying is appealing.” Gisele chimed in.

They sat and ate their food, Ismeld looking like she would fall back to sleep at any moment. She essentially ignored Sloane and Gisele while they talked. Only joining when addressed directly.

Sloane was the last to have food in front of her. She looked over at Ismeld who had put her head onto her arms on the table.

“She’s really tired, huh?”

“Yes,” Gisele responded and then nudged Ismeld who groaned. “Ismeld, go back upstairs. I’ll take Sloane to the others and you can come to join us later.”

Ismeld just nodded as she dragged herself out of the chair and lethargically made her way back to her room.

“You have your water skin?”

“Of course. I need to refill it though.”

“That’s fine, there’s a place to do it on the way. Let’s go. The others should have barely started.”

Sloane tilted her head. “Started what?”

“Training.”

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Sloane sat on a barrel and observed as Deryk and Cristole sparred. The two weren't going especially hard, they seemed to be practicing technique. Deryk had a more aggressive approach while Cristole was slow and methodical.

They fought back and forth for two minutes before Deryk overextended and Cristole took advantage and tapped him on the shoulder with his blade. Sloane was impressed, that was a very long time for such fighting. Sloane had done fencing in college but had never been especially good at it. Those fights usually ended quickly; each round was until five touches or ended at three minutes.

This, however, was much different. She supposed that since it wasn't for sport and was for *literal* life-and-death situations, they would need to have far more skill and knowledge.

Deryk saluted. "That was well-timed."

"You almost had me! I had nearly tried to take the momentum before you pressed harder, it was the only reason I was in a position to take advantage." Cristole explained.

"I need to rein in my aggressive tendencies as a fight progresses. Thank you for the spar."

Cristole looked over to Ernard. "Ernard! You're next. Let's go!"

Ernard groaned.

Sloane smiled. "Get over there! You got this!"

Ernard glared at her. "You and I *both* know that I do *not* have this, Sloane."

"Pssssh, Cristole's a big softie. You can do it with one arm behind your back!"

Cristole raised a brow in her direction. "I'm not sure what you're joking around for, *Lady* Sloane. You're after him."

"Oh."

Ernard laughed and Gisele joined in. "Come over here, Sloane. We'll do some stance work while they spar."

Sloane sighed but hopped down from the barrel and walked over.

Gisele got right to it. "Alright, so. Take your stance."

She looked over Sloane's foot placement. "Not bad, but it's the wrong type of stance for the type of sword you have. You seem to keep gravitating to it. You've been practicing a bit with Cristole a bit here and there, but I can't remember if I've ever heard your answer. Have you used a sword before? In your world? I thought I recall you saying you hadn't."

Sloane thought of how to explain. "Well, I don't know how to use a sword to *fight* and as a weapon of war. I was an amateur fencer years ago in... uh... Academy. It's a competitive sport."

Gisele nodded. "I understand. We need to break that habit. You've been busy doing a lot of other things during our travel here. Your mind has been overwhelmed. I think it's time for us to take your training seriously. You will need to know how to use a blade."

"You're right. I need to learn how to incorporate it with my magic as well."

"I agree. Now, stand like this."

Gisele proceeded to explain and show a proper fighting stance for her blade. They went over footwork and how to properly reposition for the most effective response or attack. Sloane really enjoyed the knight's teaching style due to how involved Gisele was in the process.

They continued that way for nearly forty-five minutes, just doing various drills and exercises to get used to moving and holding a sword properly. Sloane was sweating profusely by the time they finished.

Gisele looked her over. "I think that's it for now. Also, I think we need to get you a different style of sword. We can talk later." She then inclined her head and indicated toward the side.

Sloane turned and looked to what Gisele was gesturing to and saw Cristole just standing and observing them. She addressed him, "Have you been watching long?"

"About ten minutes. You're doing well. Now, take a small break. Then it's our turn to fight."

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Sloane was ready to go after taking a five-minute breather and drinking some water. She noticed that Gisele and Ernard were off to the side talking, and Deryk had disappeared.

*Maybe he used stealth and is finally going full rogue. You never go full rogue, they prefer to do it from behind.*

She quickly glanced behind herself and lazily swung an arm. *Just checking.*

She laughed at herself and drew Cristole's attention. "If you can laugh, you can fight. Let's go."

"Alright already!"

She stepped out in the center of the courtyard they were in and raised the training blade Gisele had given her. It was blunted and shouldn't damage someone other than a few bruises here and there.

Sloane was about to let Cristole know she was ready when he launched into movement. She hastily raised her blade and blocked his swing then jumped back to avoid his follow-through.

"You should always be ready to fight." Cristole admonished.

"Well, you didn't get me yet. So, I'd say I'm doing okay so far." Sloane riposted.

She did a short thrust that he parried and she followed it up with a cut toward his arm. Sloane thought she would get him when she felt the painful slap of his blade on her opposite arm.

"Shit! Ouch. That hurt." She exclaimed as she instinctively went to rub the area.

"You overextended and went for an attack when you didn't have the initiative or positioning. Be patient."

She nodded and they restarted.

Sloane lasted fifteen seconds. The following time she made it to twenty-two.

They were at it again and She had just parried a thrust then followed it up with a cut across his arm. Her go-to strike due to the difference in reach.

Cristole hopped out of the way and swung his blade toward her. She quickly brought her blade up to block and without thinking about it, brought her left hand up and pulsed a small orb of mana toward him.

Her eyes went wide and so did his as he leaped backward trying to avoid it. Cursing in surprise as he did. Sloane instinctively felt out to the mana and tried to will it to stop. Instead of just dissipating, the orb detonated in a flash of light and sound. Completely startling everyone around. Sloane's eyes grew as she realized everyone around had their hands over their eyes.

Taking advantage of Cristole's disorientation, Sloane quickly rushed forward and tapped him in the chest with her blade. "Got ya!"

Cristole raised his hand for her to stop while he used his other hand to rub at his eyes.

"Sloane, what the..." Cristole started

She suddenly felt a bit sheepish. "Sorry... you okay?"

Cristole nodded as Gisele and Ernard came forward. The orkun woman looked concerned. "What was that? Did you try to hurt him?"

Ernard walked to Cristole and started checking him over.

Cristole spoke up before Sloane could, "I'm fine. Just momentarily made my vision go white. It's coming back. Like looking into the sun. My ears are still ringing though."

Sloane was pretty sure she knew what had happened, even if it was unintentional. She explained to the group, "I accidentally shot a mana burst at him when I was surprised. I managed to gain control of the spell while it was flying toward him and caused it to detonate in what I had hoped was a way that wouldn't hurt him. I *think* I just accidentally cast a magical version of what my people know as a flashbang. A non-lethal disorienting device."

Ernard looked as if he was about to ask a question, but Gisele beat him to it, "Can you do it again?"



Ernald's eyes widened in surprise, and even Cristole raised a brow while rubbing at his eyes.

Sloane looked between the two men. "Are you sure that's a good idea, Gisele?"

"Yes, it will be fine. Give it a try"

Sloane considered. "Let me try. Please don't look directly at it and cover your ears. Gisele, can you throw up a shield between you guys and the center area?"

Gisele nodded. "I can do that. One moment."

Sloane observed Gisele as she focused on her mana and then cast a shield a moment later, exactly where specified. The shield looked just as it had the first time she'd done it. Sloane smiled, *she's getting better at that.*

She concentrated and launched another mana bolt, then threw her Intent onto it. Sloane was able to feel the mana easier than before. She shaped it into the purpose she wanted before willing it to detonate.

The effect was much more refined and purposeful. The flash was quicker to dissipate, yet brighter, and the bang a bit louder. Sloane heard a scream from nearby and looked around and saw a few people that hadn't been there before covering their ears.

Sloane was just about to say something when a couple of guards came rushing into the courtyard, following behind some regular people who were pointing at the knights.

The first guard that entered called out, "What's going on here?!"

Another guard whose armor designated him as higher ranking was right behind him. His gaze stopped on the shield, then regarded Sloane's outstretched hand. "All of you. Put any weapons you have down."

He pointed at Sloane. "And you, do not move."

The knights looked between the guards and Sloane.

Ser Gisele sighed. "Ah, shit."