Chapter 53 (Arc 2 Chapter 7) Headquarters

We followed behind Bylura. The wolf girl’s ears were constantly moving which made her look cute from behind. When Callem spoke her ears stilled as she was trying to focus in on our conversation, “Storme are you sure you want your building in the skyship docking area? Your restaurant may not get a lot of traffic then. The upper city that has the road to the mountain dungeon or east city where the other dungeon is located would be better locations.”

Callem was offering his advice but my choice was not based on making coins. It was based on the closeness to the skyship docks and one of the highest security zones in the city. The naval docks were adjacent and both the navy and city guard had barracks within this mostly warehouse district. “No Callem I plan to just have a small restaurant. I don’t actually plan to actually work in the restaurant.”

As we walked I studied all the buildings and people we passed. The city was clean and the people were well dressed but still had an edge to them from the attack. Only a few signs of the attack remained and I could see workers fixing buildings and few mages assisting with spells. In another few weeks, it would look like nothing happened. The Triumvirate trying to erase the memory of the attack.

Bylura stopped at a small tavern off the main thoroughfare. We walked inside and it smelled bad and looked worse. Bylura stated, “This is the cheapest building Loriel’s contact found for you. 1200 gold with an annual tax of 31 gold and 22 silver.” I walked through and the smell of urine and vomit in the bathroom made me gag. I spammed my cleanliness doing the owner a favor. The upstairs had just three rooms and all were stuffed with crates.

“It's too small for my needs and I was hoping for something on the main road from the docks to the east city,” I said after my thorough inspection. Bylura scrunched her long canine nose. I think she was agitated but didn’t want to show it.

“The next offering is quite a bit more,” she led the way back to the main street.

I turned to Callem, “So do you think she was illegally trained to fight or that she is an actual Wolfsguard?” I asked of Bylura. Bylura missed a step and her ears perked. Callem grinned at me.

“Definitely not a Wolfsguard,” was all Callem said as we walked.

A much less haughty wolf girl showed the next building. “This inn was called The Puzzled Goose. One of the co-owners was killed in the recent attack and the other owner is selling. 4500 gold and tax is 35 gold,” she said smugly. I think she thought I couldn’t afford it. I had my winnings from my bet on Gareth, 16 platinum and another 10 platinum from my deal with Loriel. So they would put my fortune at 2600 gold if Loriel had checked.

The inn looked well run and had a nice common room that could seat 10 at a bar and had 4 tables with 6 chairs each. Not very large. The inn had a second and third floor with five rooms on each floor. It would not be a bad option at all if I hadn’t walked into the kitchen. The kitchen was tiny and there was a hidden suite on the first floor for the owner. He had bastardized his kitchen to create a low-cost room for himself. “Not bad,”I said turning to Bylura. “You have one more property? I assumed you saved the best for last?”

The white wolf girl didn’t say anything just walked ahead. I turned to Callem, “Maybe you can give her some tips on how to hide walk?” He looked at me and the girl's ears looked to be straining toward us. Callem took the hint.

Speaking loudly he started, “If I wanted to alter my gait so that an observer wouldn’t be aware that I trained in the Falcon’s Strike style of sword I would…” Callem went on to detail four different things he would do to obfuscate his walking. That was a problem with trying so hard to train the muscle memory for sword forms, it bled into your everyday actions. I sometimes found myself cooking using various motions from sword forms. I would try to resist doing this in the future.

For me… not a big deal but if they found out Bylura was training in combat I assumed she would either be killed or count towards the Miaden’s house count of 200 Wolfsguard. It was funny to watch the girl to incorporate Callem’s suggestions in real time and I didn’t fail to notice that she had looped us around to give herself more time to listen to Callem and practice.

When we got to the final building it was huge. It was a full-fledged restaurant, seating for 120, a large kitchen, a large cellar, and a second floor with seven staff rooms. It was fully functional and I couldn’t understand why anyone would want to sell it. It was on the main road and right on the border of the dock and trade districts.

“So Bylura how much is this one?” I asked after the tour.

“It is not for sale,” she started. “It is owned by the Miaden family but my mistress would allow you to invest 2,000 gold for a 20% share in the profits of the building.” I scoffed.

“20% of the profits? You could just narrow your margins enough to minimize profits and pay me nothing!” Where did that come from? So tidbit of information from my past life. Bylura seemed a little taken aback and Callem’s eyes widened. “I am not looking to invest,” I stated firmly. “Now let's go look at two properties I noticed on our very entertaining tour today.”

Callem seemed amused as I now led the way to the exasperated wolf girl. I was in front so the two walked side by side and Callem started whispering to her and helping her with hiding her martial ability. The first building I came to was a four-story bakery. The upper three floors were apartments and the bakery didn’t appear to be doing too well.

The location was perfect but after the building's owner was summoned he couldn’t sell the building. The apartments housed a fair number of naval personnel and made good profits. So that killed my first choice. My other choice was a literal warehouse by the trade docks. It was on the corner of skyship docks and main thoroughfare. It was solid white stone and had one side facing the docks that was 300’ long and another section along the road that was 100’. The building was just over 40’ in height was a flat roof. A fairly massive structure.

What had drawn my interest was the fact that the center half of the building had collapsed and no effort had been made to haul away debris from the interior. Bylura looked seriously confused when I asked about the building. She didn’t have a clue so she was going to have to go and talk with her contact in the city. I noticed a pastry shop across the street and told her that Callem and I would wait there for her to return. She hurried off.

As we sat with a hot drink and some sweet pastry rolls Callem asked, “I don’t know Storme. This Loriel seems to be trying to tie you to her. That offer for 20% was extremely generous even if it was a ploy as you pointed out.” He sipped and I could tell he was intently people-watching in this high-traffic area. “And this building,” he pointed across the street, “I don’t see what you do in it. Are you just yanking the wolf girl around?”

I gave Callem a devilish smile, “Potential. That building has potential. The location is perfect and with some major renovations, the back half could be made into a nice little hanger while the front half could serve as a restaurant and still have enough space for a second and third floor to add housing for the adventuring team.” My excitement didn’t translate over to the skeptical Callem.

It was twenty minutes longer before Bylura brought back a middle-aged man in finery with the Miaden house crest pinned on his robes. “Good Storme,” the man sat wheezing a bit to face Callem. “I apologize for not giving you the tour personally today the Wolfkid insisted she bring you herself.” Bylura rolled her eyes at his comment.

“Magistrate Nassir this is Storme,” Bylura indicated to me instead of Callem and he flushed in embarrassment. “And I only said I would give him a tour of the buildings because I didn’t know when he was arriving!” she added irritated.

An embarrassed Nassir turned to me, “Storme! I can see why Loriel Miaden is interested in such a fine young…” Bylura elbowed him and he got the point. “So yeah…you are interested in the warehouse across the street. Um, let me see.” He pulled some papers out of the satchel under his robes and sat at our table.

While he fumbled with the papers I slid the tray of pastries to Bylura who had some drool on her mouth. She reluctantly took one and then another. Secreting both into clothes for later.

The magistrate continued, “So the building is owned by Dunnar Miaden…who died in the assault when the building collapsed from an attack. No beneficiaries. It has been emptied…” He paged through some more documents.

Callem studied me and the magistrate while sipping on the aromatic tea he had. He was curious about what I was going to do. He was treating me like an adult for some time now. It was almost as if he guessed I was older than I appeared…

“So here…yes chain of custody. The warehouse belongs to the Miaden central family now…so I guess we can sell it to you.” He paged through some more documents, “A warehouse this size…fair price should be 12,000 gold.” He looked at me and I just gestured to the half-destroyed structure. “Ah yeah…it does have some problems.”

“And as you have already mentioned Loriel wants to do me a favor. And I will need the property rezoned for restaurants and housing.” I said while being patient as he got a little more flustered.

“7,800 gold with the rezoning…” He offered tentatively. He was looking for approval.

“6,000,” I countered, “or 7,000 if you clean the debris and supply the material to fix the collapsed section.” I finished. I wasn’t aware of the building costs or codes but figured it would be easier to get a head start on the rebuilding. Nassir was doing the math in his head. Would it cost the Miaden more or less than 1,000 gold to meet my demands on the warehouse?

“7000 gold. Yes, 7000 gold for the property is doable. We can clear the building in maybe 20 days and get you the replacement stone in less time. Most of it will be your own recycled stone by the Miaden construction mages though. The crews are mostly finished in the rest of the city. Should I start the paperwork?” He asked.

I looked at the building. It was on the corner with the long side facing the plaza on one side and the other side had a narrow alley than a similar warehouse. My warehouse had open space in the rear, about 120’ of rough ground before reaching the city wall. I guessed there might have been an old warehouse standing there prior. “The land behind the warehouse to the wall. How much for that land as well? I don’t plan to build anything but don’t want any surprises popping up.”

Nassir pulled out some maps and cross-checked some things, “It is owned by the city. 1500 gold without any building permits. I can not negotiate on the price, it is fixed,” he added worriedly.

So 8,500 gold before construction. I looked at Callem who seemed amused. “Callem did you bring twenty-five platinum with you?” He gave me a guilty look.

“Thirty-nine Storme,” he said slowly. Callem had my winnings from Gareth and then some. I wasn’t sure why he had brought so much. I reached into my bag and pulled out the ten platinum I had gotten from Loriel and another bundle of fifty platinum coins. I placed them on the table, two pouches.

“Callem you need to add twenty-five so our new friend here can start the transaction and begin to clear the old warehouse.” Bylura and Nassir eyes popped at the bags of coins on the table. Callem just added his own pouch to the two I had already placed without changing his facial expression like it was the most natural thing in the world.

Nassir slowly took all three coin pouches. “I will get on this.” He stood like he might be stopped suddenly.

Bylura said with some exasperation, “You are just going to trust him with your coin without any guarantee notes?”

I said, “Yes,” to her and got the exasperated look I wanted. My uncaring spending made the wolf girl turn and leave in a huff, her job done. I addressed Callem, “Callem we should head into the trade district for your shopping trip.” I yelled to the leaving wolf girl, “Bylura if you could do me a favor and send an architect to Hen’s Hollow for a week to work with me on my new building. I am sure Loriel knows a good one.” She held up a first without turning around. That was a gesture that was similar to the middle finger.

As we walked away Callem asked, “That was a lot of coin. They will assume it was my coin but even that may start to raise questions. What is your plan Storme?”

“I am thinking long term. Half of the building is going to be a hangar. I am going to build my own skyship. The other half will be the restaurant and have residences on the upper two floors. The dungeon delving team will help gather resources to build the skyship and live in the upper floors. I will be attending the academy in Aegis city next year. The dungeon academy. I will make use of their combat mage track.” I spelled out my plan to Callem.

“And where does Gareth fall into your plan?” Callem asked.

“That is why I decided on the dungeon academy to continue learning my magic. I don’t plan to delve into dungeons myself but the capital academies are too dangerous. We have talked about this before.” I said.

“And Aelyn?” Callem finally asked.

“With the skyship we can get to the lowlands and remove her tattoo,” I said without hesitation.

“I was looking forward to interviewing your prospective dungeoneers. Since we are not doing that today when do you think you will need my help with that aspect of your grand plan?” Callem said while making eye contact. His golden eyes seemed to look right through to my soul.

“So you are on board?” I asked Callem.

“On board your future skyship?” he chuckled. “I am too old for such an adventure. But kidding aside Wynna and myself will move to the city while you two are in the academy here.”

I reached a little, “I would be happy to include an apartment for you two in the new headquarters.”

“Headquarters? I guess that fancy term could describe your building. Yes, that would be most thoughtful of you and lend credence that we were both somehow involved in financing this project,” Callem said. He grinned, “Would we be able to eat for free at your restaurant?”

I started laughing, “Fine! But then you two will have to pose as being the owners of the building for real! Your names are going on the deed together. So plan to marry Wynna.”

Callem stopped laughing and looked at me with a serious gaze, “Agreed. But if you are putting her name on the deed she is going to want input into its design. You opened that can of butterflies!”

We entered a weapons shop. The weapons didn’t match the ones I created with my skill but they were good. I wandered around while Callem started talking with the old smith and adding various weapons to the counter. Callem was using coin I created to get the students at our academy better weapons to practice and train with. The folding steel method was not used by this smith. His weapons were all high-quality steel with no defects that I could find as I touched them and used my ability.

I did get some ideas with shapes and ways to reinforce my own work. The two hours we were in the shop Callem bought four bundles of weapons that were carefully wrapped together. He knew the old smith personally and they were lively in talking about old times and the weapons Callem was selecting.

Callem slung the packs of weapons on his back as we returned to the skydocks. We had over two hours to wait. The cool thing was I could clearly see my new building. I could add a nice garden on top of the building and we could watch the skyships come and go.

Our skyship back to Hen’s Hollow called for boarding. The trip back home I spent putting together the perfect headquarters in my head.