**Chapter 32 Pascal’s Fourteenth Celebration**

As I walked with Callem I recast my *obfuscate* spell and set it to show my aether core at 10% of its actual size. So someone with a reading ability would see it as 123, still sizable for a 12-year-old but not overly threatening.

I asked Callem what he had purchased at the general store to start a conversation during the walk. He said just some consumables and showed me the list. He had a long list that was focused on restocking the two larders on the farm. He had purchased everything I had requested for cooking and much much more. We were consuming food at a prodigious rate with 7 people living there. I noted he had bought enough ingredients to make chili a dozen times over and ingredients to make ice cream a few times. Dessert was a bit of a new concept for everyone and it was something that was growing on Callem. All the supplies were being shipped out to the Gaskill farm to be loaded onto Callem’s new cart. Callem also mentioned that Wynna was paying a fair portion of the food bill. Apparently, his new live-in girlfriend was paying rent in food.

Getting a little bolder I asked if we could go to the city today to buy a few things. Callem hadn’t given me any money for working his farm in quite some time. Callem, like he always did, was processing the question. Before responding, “What do you need in the city Storme?”

I was ready with an answer, “I want to get some chocolate to make chocolate ice cream. I also wanted to go to *Marigold’s Mystical Emporium* to get some spells. I don’t have any coins but I could use the bracelet or I could…” I left the rest unsaid especially after Callem’s cool gaze fell on me.

Callem stopped walking and his brow creased. A few moments later he spoke, “Yes. Yes, we will go to the city and I will accompany you. Can you create coins now in your pockets?” I nodded. “Well make as much platinum as you can. I have five of your platinum with me so no need to use your bracelet to withdraw funds. I will go with you and I will supply the coins for your purchases. That should divert all attention to me. We should make an effort to spend a few platinum. That way it should get back to the thugs that robbed you whose coin they stole.” Callem look turned a little malicious. “If you see them point them out to me.” He had a grin now. “How many more can you make?” Callem asked.

“I should be able to make two complete platinum coins,” I responded.

“Good. You can palm them to me at the party.” Callem paused again. “When we get to the city do not speak out of turn. You are smart enough to know what not to say. After this trip everyone should think that your benefactors are Wynna and me,” I nodded. Hy thoughts had turned to what spells I hoped to purchase.

Callem started walking again and I had to jog a little to catch up. I think he was excited.

It was great to see my family’s house. The noise from inside was quite loud as everyone was singing a folksong regarding reaching the age of maturity. It was around lunchtime and I actually didn’t know when the party was. I guess it was now.

Callem held us back until the song finished and then we entered. Everyone turned to us and everyone went as still as a statue. Oh, they hadn’t expected me back and I surprised them. “Hi everyone!” I said awkwardly and waved. My entire family was there. I could hear Monty pawing at the bedroom door of my sister’s room anxious to mingle. In addition, Pascal’s five friends were there and Brianne was as well. Brianne was standing awfully close to Pascal too. These seven would all be going to the academy together in a few months. They were the seven from town and there was another half dozen or so from the outlying farms too that would make up Pascal’s first-year class. “Uh, happy fourteenth brother,” I said as I moved into the room. Then I noticed no one's eyes were following me. They were locked to the doorway behind me. I turned and Callem stood there taking up the entire doorway. I guess I was a little pompous to think they were surprised to see me.

“Everyone this is Callem. I mean Captain Callem. I have been out living with him for a while now.” Mother and father were the first to move. They both went to Callem and started talking with him in soft voices so no one could overhear. I moved to the group of Pascal’s friends and soon found Freya hugging me.

“Storme, I missed you!” She pulled me down to whisper, “The sword is in my room. Mom did the engraving on the scabbard and Antal did the handle. Mom paid for the scabbard and dad got the dragon bone for the handle. It looks marvelous! Pascal is sure to love it!” I had actually forgotten I had made Pascal a sword for his birthday. My life was so stressful and I had been intently focusing on learning spells. “We are going to eat first and then do gifts!” Before I could ask her what happened to the coin I gave her to buy the scabbard and handle Freya had moved off.

Callem had finished talking with Caleb and Alurha and they were all smiles. Mother motioned me to the small kitchen to help with the food. Of course, I wouldn’t get away without cooking. The meal was to be chicken fajitas with honey ginger rice. There were a few bottles of wine on the table as well as it was customary for your 14th birthday to drink a glass of wine or beer. Most kids had tried alcohol long before this birthday though. Both me and Gareth had downed a bottle or two ourselves.

“That blade is marvelous Storme! How did you ever get Callem to part with it?” My mother asked in a hushed whisper as we heated up the food. My mother thought Callem gave the blade to Pascal? Of course, she did as it was probably quite valuable. I held my tongue not wanting to say something in error. They had just talked with Callem and I looked over at him and he winked. Son of a bitch, he had taken credit for the sword! I was angry for the briefest moment before thinking that this was a good thing. I didn’t need the recognition.

Soon everyone was eating and happy. I listened here and there as this group was not really my friends. They were mostly talking about their upcoming entry into the academy. Freya had accidentally let out Monty and she was chasing him to get him back in the room. The excitement of the guests was too much for him though and he was dodging her at every turn. I sat on one of the few chairs and just relaxed for a bit. Brianne came up to me and leaned against the wall by my side. “How is Gareth doing?” she asked.

“He is doing pretty good,” I said. This crowd was not Brianne’s normal group. She usually hung out with the younger kids in town. “Do you want me to pass a message onto him for you?” I asked as Brianne had not moved.

“No I was just wondering if he was ok,” she said. She didn’t move and a minute later added, “On second thought just tell him I was wondering why he wasn’t here as well.” After a brief pause, she added, “And also tell him that I was happy to hear he was doing well.” She smiled at me and moved away. Well, Gareth still had a chance with Brianne if he was interested. Maybe she came to this party in hopes of running into him? I didn’t understand women at all.

Soon the gift-giving started. Pascal’s friends started. They gave him some silly gifts that I assumed had some meaning from the years they had played and practiced together. Freya went to her room and returned with the sword. It was wrapped in fine white cloth. Mother intercepted her and tried to give the sword to Callem to present to Pascal but Callem motioned to me and mother walked over to hand the package to me.

It was obvious it was a sword but still, all eyes were on me. Taking the sword I approached Pascal, “Brother what we have here is a gift from your family. The blade was given by Callem…I mean Captain Callem but mother made and engraved the scabbard, father had the work done on the hilt and Freya was instrumental in getting it all completed, carrying it from Callem’s farm to here. I…” what did I do then? “I…I have paid Callem for his time to teach you how to use it properly. He will…” I didn’t have a chance to finish as Pascal jumped up and actually hugged me. Chatter began as Pascal then proceeded to unwrap the blade and then draw it. Everyone was awed by the blade, even me. It was passed around and when it got to Callem he spent a good minute studying it before passing it along. I inspected the handle and sheath and both were impressive and highlighted the blade I had made.

Everyone was clapping and congratulating and clapping Pascal on the back. I moved to be next to Callem to talk.

“It is a fine blade Storme,” Callem said. “Definitely created by magic and should serve your brother extremely well. Do you know what such a blade is worth?” he asked.

I didn’t really care. It was just an hour or two of work on my part but I decided to humor Callem with a guess. “Fifty gold?”

Callem huffed. “No. Not even close. People would pay five hundred on a bad day for a blade like that. Twice that on a good day.” I was in a little shock. Maybe making coins was the wrong way to make my fortune. That blade may make your brother a target. I will make sure your parents know to let him know to temper his enthusiasm in showing it off.” I took this moment to stuff the two platinum coins into Callem’s pocket. Callem moved away from me to make another fajita and talk with mother.

Callen and I soon after made our excuses to leave. I got hugs from everyone in my family and Callem said Pascal could come to the farm tomorrow for four weeks of training with his other students. Pascal was over the moon and I had to smirk a little as Callem hadn’t mentioned the three young women. Pascal was probably just thinking it would be me and Gareth. He was going to be in for a shock!

We started on the road to the city and Callem started talking about blades non-stop. I threw up my arms and said I got the hint. He wanted me to make him some swords. He had a giddy childish grin on his face. Then he began detailing six different blades he wanted me to make for him, two blades were for him, one for me, one for Callem, one for Aelyn, and one for Cilia. As we approached the city he said it was time to watch our language and keep our eyes peeled. We ended the one-sided sword discussion and passed through the gates.