*Chapter 47: Out of Time*

Saradette and Tore stood before the avatar of Lurue, who had just expressed her gratitude for their heroism, and her regret for Mayaheine’s death. They were standing on a blue, roughly quadratic platform adjoined to another by a narrow causeway, and the goddess stood to their assumed north.

A colorful design on a black background

Description automatically generated with medium confidence

Beneath them, Astral catfish cleaned the area of debris that washed up from the tidal time pools that flowed this way.

Lurue’s cleric was presented with the entirety of the Vestments of Divinity, while Saradette’s gadgets were all instantly miniaturized to half their volume and weight, and she was given the knowledge with which to similarly minimize the encumbrance of additional devices such that she could *double* her number of augmentations.

Saradette examined her artifacts in wonder as the implications of Lurue’s gift sank in. “Thank you so much,” she said with a bow of respect.

“These gifts are bestowed unto you by Gond, whose presence is focused elsewhere. You have acted in a manner commensurate with powers and responsibilities above your station, and for this, the Heavens reward you both, and entrust you with further prowess that your hands might be better guided towards the cause of righteousness. “Your aasimar statuses were a provisional bestowment that bound you to remain steadfast in the face of temptation. You are now something more than that which you were before.”

It dawned on Saradette that this place was themed around time, though Lurue’s portfolio was more about magical beasts. Then she started identifying elements indicative of Gond’s craftsmanship, and was reminded of the time they’d stormed the Temple of Gond in Mintar, ridding the clergy of infiltrators and charlatans.

Gond’s chronicling of time, and its quantification, did not extend his powers to influence time directly, though legends spoke of gatecrashers and even artificers who had divined the fabric of spacetime so well that they could craft items that could bend the Weave’s influence over the flow of time.

Tore looked around in awe. He watched the Astral catfish as they swam by, scooping up mouthfuls of debris. When Lurue spoke, Tore listened with his head bowed low. “Thank you for your gifts; I shall endeavor to put them to good use. It has been an honor to serve you, and I shall always be your faithful servant,” he responded after his goddess gave him his unexpected rewards.

The goddess began to disappear, bidding them well and adding, “When you are ready, step onto the hourglass, and you will *feather fall* down to Faerûn. The earlier you direct the course of your fall, the better you can choose where you land.”

Tore thought for a moment then nodded, “I have no specific destination at the moment, so Mintar is as good a place to start as any. Especially if you have property to retrieve.”

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They’d arrived in Mintar, on the same grassy field where Saradette, Argent, and others had landed years ago, returning from the cloud giant fortress that floated over the Ysgardian landscape.

Now back on Faerûn, Tore and Saradette sighed, smelling the familiar scents of sugar cane and dry grass comingled with saltwater. They hoped that Akilesh and Zvetlana had been resurrected in the service of Lurue, but these things—and many more—remained a mystery to the two mortals.

They both had a bit of history here, and might even have been able to garner some renown in certain parts of town. With no options barred to them, the reputable heroes strutted with smiles on their mugs throughout Eastgate.

Tore followed along with Saradette for now, as there was no place he was urgent to visit.

Saradette had been gravitating to the Gondar ideology since they’d left Mintar after that charlatan caper, and though the logic of the gnome deity was growing on her, she was more than curious as to the fate of the Mayaheine shrine here in Mintar now that her clerics were no longer able to receive her blessings and favors.

Shoomma’s smithy was the closest place they considered familiar, and as they took in the sights and scents of the Mintari streets, the two heroes recalled their way there, and through much of the inner city.

Saradette steered for the inn where she’d left Gadget and Widget. “I want to check on the critters first, and then the Mayaheine shrine,” she told Tore. “I like Gond’s philosophies, but I will need some time before I’m ready to visit his temple again.” The gnome still felt the emptiness at her center at her deity’s passing; it was a weakness she needed to rectify soon.

Tore nodded, “I understand and there is no rush. I to would like to see how Mayaheine’s followers are faring.”

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The Radnars had received Saradette with open arms, and though they did not recall whether they’d met Tore or not, Mrs. Radnar assured him, “Any friend of Saradette’s is like an uncle to our son.”

Their son came in at that moment, a bit taller than the gnome remembered him, and nodded in the same shy manner as had been his established custom.

Smelling Saradette, her pony poked its head in through an open window and whined a bit as she went out to the back lot adjacent to the Baron’s Keep wall and gave the pony some affection. “Gadget!” Saradette reminded the dwarf equestrian of his name.

Moments later, her raccoon—Widget—crawled out of a woodpile and went for her boots.

Saradette sat down and talked with both of them, knowing that Widget could understand much more than the pony. “I had to go where you couldn’t follow,” she said, looking at Widget. “I am sorry that happened, but you both would have died in the battles I fought in. I will do my best to keep you both with me from now on.”

Tore introduced himself and thanked the Radnars for their kind sentiment. When he saw their son, he inquired, “So, what plans do you have? Do you plan to do any traveling or exploring, or is there something here in Mintar that piques your interests?”

“Oh, no, not me, sir,” the youth bashfully said. “My life is here.”

Tore could discern from the boy’s pronunciation that he had spent nary a day in a classroom, and had likely never seen the world outside the greater confines of this barony.

Saradette had by now begun unpacking her workshop in order to evaluate her artifacts. They’d all been heavily used, and Gond and Lurue had rendered them all much smaller and lighter. She planned to reverse engineer the sacred innovations, and apply the same process to her methane handling and production system with the aim to increase its capacity and efficiency.

“Will you be staying a while?” Mrs. Radnar asked Tore as Saradette busied herself.

“I believe so. Once Saradette is done with her inspection, I believe the plan is to visit the temple of Mayaheine. There they will talk to the clerics and see what they know and what they have picked up. After that, stops at the temple of Lurue for Tore would be in order.”

Mrs. Radnar appear conveyed condolences for Mayaheine’s passing, “We heard from the criers just today.”

Tore noted his appreciation for her kind words, and pivoted, “Might you recommend some shops and a local tavern for gossip and news?”

“I believe Saradette knows of a few, but yes, the Southspur has had a makeover since we rid ourselves of the rats,” Mrs. Radnar referred to the lycanthropes. “Anything on the strip is sure to host a good atmosphere.”

The conversation eventually turned to Vaasa, where Tore mentioned wishing to go. Mr. Radnar interjected, “You look like a man with the means to pay for passage there, but if you happen to be in the market for work, there is a merchant caravan that passes through Vaasa on its way to Narfell, and they’re looking for some muscle. It’s leaving in three days’ time if I heard right from the woman at the market.”

“*What* woman?” asked Mrs. Radnar.

“Just a merchant whose wares will be part of the caravan’s merchandise,” her husband promptly answered.

“*Wares*, eh?” the woman revealed some prior conversation they’d had.

Tore diplomatically steered the topic back to the prospect, “Where would we find this caravan, if we were inclined to join them to Vaasa?”

Mr. Radnar pointed them to the Fishersgate, which Saradette knew well. They could pass through the Gnome Depot, where they could stock up on just about anything.”

Tore enjoyed some tea as Saradette toiled and learned her way through the circuitry that channeled arcane energies through her miniaturized devices. She joined her friend at the table and reported, “It’s a fascinating field: miniaturization.” She sighed, estimating, “I’ll need a few more days to really get the ins and outs, but it’s looking promising: I should soon be able fabricate other mini-versions of these and other devices. I wonder if the Baronial Library has any good resources.”

“The Gondar Temple should for sure,” Tore posed.

They were ready to head out to the Shrine to Mayaheine, mostly to see what was becoming of it now that it housed no deific powers.

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They reached the Shrine to Mayaheine, which was now cordoned off as laborers installed a plaque on the main pylon. Approaching, they could read the words and the logo of the Mintar Historical Society, designating this as a protected, public-access site.

The man that Saradette had once known as Bishop Jericho recognized her as she approached the moderate crowd, and called out her name. She turned and recognized him almost immediately. The last time they’d spoken, the cleric had abandoned the faith of Tyr, and was retiring from his holy profession. He was now wearing laymen’s clothing, and bore a much happier face than she remembered.

Saradette nodded respectfully to the former cleric. “How are the people here taking her death? I was in the battle, but I didn’t see all of what happened.”

“There aren’t many of her flock in town, and most have gone to the Temple of Tyr, who has allegedly assumed many of her domains and powers,” answered the former cleric.

A person with long hair and beard

Description automatically generated

“That’s good,” Saradette pursed her lips in thought. “Do you, or any of the people, need anything?”

“We are... relieved that the Shieldmaiden’s powers have not been subsumed by evil forces,” sighed the human, then spotting another familiar face, “Ah! Your friend... Elsabet.”

Saradette, who was dressed in a simple bleached linen tunic with woolen breeches and low boots, turned toward her friend. “Elsabet! It’s good to see you, despite the sad circumstances.”

Elsabet greeted Saradette somberly, getting down on her knees to give her old adventuring companion a hug.

“It seems like a long time has passed since that big battle, where I took off and didn’t manage to meet up with you again. A lot of things have happened since we parted ways, but these recent upheavals....”

She shook her head and got back to her feet. “So, how have you been? You have had some rough times?”

The gnome sighed and nodded. “Tore and I died at one point, which was a blessing after what we went through in Lantan.” She managed a smile for her friend. “I’m glad to be home, though.”

“I’ve been in and out of Mintar on and off, initially spreading the word of Mayaheine with a group of folks I collected. But when in town, I made sure to stop by the Minotaur to check on your four-footed friends. I’ve got a sort of community house not far from here, you’re always welcome to stay with us, though the Minotaur may be more to your liking.”

“We get along well with the Radnars, and I’m sure our coin helps them, too. But, we will certainly come visit as we are able.”

“With the Shieldmaiden fallen, I felt riven in two, but after much soul searching and meditation, I found myself drawn to Mielikki, and she has accepted my service. I have as you know been drawn to nature, through the eldritch power which let me speak with the beasts, and my Fey heritage.”

“I think I will visit the Gondar priests. They were nice people, and Gond seems to be a good deity for me to follow.”

Jericho recalled Saradette’s previous heroism associated with the Gondars in town. “You were part of the effort to root out and apprehend the culprits... that Dromedar fellow.”

“Yes, and Who, the Bone Whisperer. I believe we defeated him yesterday, though it may have been a simulacrum,” she admitted, noticing Karlon standing behind Elsabet.

“I still intend to help and protect those who need it, but my adventures are of a more common bent now, traveling the roads and trails around this region. My right-hand man, Karlon Holt, is a great help in this regard, a skilled scout with some ranger and fighter training, very skilled with his crossbow.”

“That’s commendable,” Saradette said. “I’m still trying to figure out what I want to be when I grow up.”

“Looks like you’ve *already* become a miniaturization specialist,” the former Bishop of Tyr commended her on her crafty, lightweight devices.

Elsabet grinned at the gnome woman. “Oh, I think if you haven’t grown up by now, I don’t think you have to. Have you seen your big blue friend from the clouds lately? I hope he’s doing well. Anyways, let me give you my address.”

She opened her current journal to its back page, used her *amanuensis* spell to copy the text on the inside of the back cover (which read ‘If found, please return to Elsabet at’ with her address in the Silver Hill District shown) onto the top of the back of the blank page, and carefully tore out that part of the page and handed it to the artificer gnome. “Any time, day or night, whether I’m home or not; I’ll add you to the special guests list.”

“Ooh! Silver Hill!” Saradette was impressed.

“It’s near the Gnome Depot,” she smiled with fond memories.

Tore listened as the others talked, not interrupting and standing off in the background. He had recalled Elsabet, but did not know her. When the conversation came to a close, Tore stepped forward, “I did not want to interrupt. I’ve heard of you and it is a pleasure to meet you. I am glad you have found a new spiritual guide and inspiration.” He looked down at Saradette then back at Elsabet, “I am not sure how long we are staying, but I do appreciate the offer of shelter, but we would not want to impose.”

The former Bishop of Tyr nodded, returned the kind greeting and said, “Now I’m just plain *Jericho*.”

Elsabet also nodded at Tore. “A pleasure to meet you as well. Any friend of Saradette is always welcome at my hearth and home, whether to stay for a time or simply visit.” She repeated what she’d done for Saradette, giving the human a copy of the address, and getting his name for the list. “If you’ve had my gal’s back in a fracas, that’s good enough for me.”

With the knowledge that they had lodging options other than the Missing Minotaur at their immediate avail, the heroes contemplated whether to head to the Gondar Temple immediately or after a meal.

As the spiritual issue was Saradette’s, Tore deferred to her where they go next. He was fine visiting the temple or getting a bite to eat and gathering news about happenings outside of Mintar.

“Let’s find a meal, and then we can go to the Gondar temple,” Saradette suggested.

Tore nodded as his stomach growled, “That is an agreeable suggestion.”

“Very well, you pick the place,” the gnome replied as she turned to her friend. “Elsabet, you’re welcome to join us.”

Elsabet said she had an appointment to keep, and wished them an enjoyable meal. She said goodbye, with a final “any time of the day at all, remember.” She gave an offered hug to Saradette, and continued on to keep her appointment.

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They were seated at a table outside a locale that they’d actually saved from being demolished by a wyste, a grotesque species of annelid with the will and power to level a settlement like this one if given the chance. They’d been conjured in great numbers by those who commanded the lycanthropes that had infiltrated the barony and its townspeople.

A cover of a game

Description automatically generated

It seemed so different now: peaceful yet bustling with locals and travelers comingling in the adjacent square and kiosks.

Saradette ordered a large plate of fried fish with a selection of steamed and fresh vegetables, and a very good summer ale. For her size, the gnome could pack in the food, and not gain weight. After demolishing the meal, she sat back with a sigh and addressed Tore. “What would you like us to do over the next month?”

Tore ordered the fish as well, with a side of potatoes and some crisp green beans. He also asked for a good wine to go with it, the server’s recommendation was requested and accepted. When he finished, he was satisfied with the meal. Sitting back and finishing off the last of his wine, Tore thought for a moment before answering Saradette’s question. “I’ve heard many things about the land of Vaasa, especially Castle Perilous and the evil that once lived there.” Looking at his friend he added, “I am fine waiting to travel until you have sorted out your miniaturization techniques, but I would eventually like to head that direction.”

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Having eaten, the pair was now meandering scenically towards the Gondar Temple, and still discussing their plans for the near future.

Tore proclaimed, “The gods have favored us as their champions; for this, we should be grateful. I regret the end of Mayaheine’s existence, and if it would add meaning to you, I would aid you in avenging her against the Malarian cults that infest the wilds between settlements.”

Saradette didn’t feel drawn to that type of quest, and was gaining closure with the situation. She was even looking forward to speaking with the Gondars after all this time. She couldn’t remember all of their names, but the notable folks were Apex, Averest, Axum, Cobol, Fortran, Linux, and Sacerdôt Fritz. They’d all been possessed by the forces that commanded both Dromedar the Alacritous and Who, the Bone Whisperer; by now, this force had been identified as a woman named Darkmother Eonsold. This, and more, the heroes would learn upon catching up with the faithful clergy.

They passed by the familiar precinct office where they’d interrogated Dromedar, and thought to go in later and say hello to Captain Slatestein and the other officers they’d met a few years back.

Tore proposed, “I will stop and say hello to Captain Slatestein while you visit the temple. You can find me there when you’re done, or I will meet you on the front steps of the temple.”

“Very well,” Saradette replied. She made her way to the temple and came up to the front door. The memories of this place were still fresh in her mind, and she mused on them as she waited to be greeted.

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Axum and Fortran received the visitor with heartfelt gladness, recounting the heroics of Saradette and her friend the day they uncovered the conspiracy of Dromedar and his ilk.

Saradette spoke with her conspecifics about her part in the conspiracy, and then she changed the subject at an opportune moment. “I don’t know if you heard, but Mayaheine was killed in battle, leaving her followers, including me, at loose ends. I think that Gond would be a good choice for me, and I wanted your guidance on what he expects of his followers.”

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Saradette, Skill** | **Rank** | **Ability**  **& Mod.** | **Misc.**  **Mods.** | **Total** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| **Diplomacy** | 2 | **Cha (+0)** | 0 | 2 | 16 – 20 | ?? |
| **Gather Information** | 1 | **Cha (+0)** | 0 | 1 | 6 – 10 | ?? |

*See below.*

The faithful converged on the premise that Gond *was* an obvious choice for a gnomish artificer, Fortran adding, “Not exactly as it is for a gnomish cleric.” They were also aware of Mayaheine’s death, and doubled down on their plug for the Gondar faith based on this.

“We regret Mayaheine’s demise,” sighed Axum, “... but it would be wise to see the blessings that Gondar has bestowed upon you, paving the path to perfection under his guidance.”

She was already aware of the *perfection* angle in Gondar aspirations and dogma. The word was used literally but flexibly on a sliding scale between the capacity of a mere mortal and that of Gond himself. They offered Saradette a booklet of about 40 pages that she could probably read in one night after spell preparation, and would grant her a working knowledge of Gondar philosophy, tenets, canonical history, and technique, though nothing on the level of her knowledge of Mayaheine, which took years to garner.

“Thank you,” the gnomish woman said with a small bow. “I will study this today, and return tomorrow.” With that, she took her leave and went to find Tore.

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Slatestein was in, and invited the fighter-cleric to sit and chat a while.

When he sat down with the Captain, Tore asked how he had been and if any other trouble had sprung up related to the wererats. Tore then inquired what information Slatestein had heard about the followers of Malar, especially if he was aware of any of their churches or strongholds. “Though we may not be staying long, we may go near one of their churches. I would not be opposed to going out of my way to see such churches torn asunder.”

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Tore, Skill** | **Rank** | **Ability**  **& Mod.** | **Misc.**  **Mods.** | **Total** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| **Diplomacy** | 2 | **Cha (+3)** | 0 | 5 | 1 – 5 | ?? |
| **Gather Information** | 0 | **Cha (+3)** | 0 | 3 | 16 – 20 | ?? |

*See below.*

As soon as Tore mentioned the Malarian Cultists and the problems they were causing, Slatestein’s face turned from a smile to a frown. He looked down for a moment as he got up and shut the door to his office, returning to the chair and confirming that Tore had understood that this was a sensitive topic. “We... ehem,” he cleared his throat first, “we shut down a couple of Malar’s places of worship out on the northern ridge.”

“Oh?” Tore raised his left eyebrow involuntarily.

“Long story short: they were getting too raging, and started regularly killing off the merchants they’d previously only robbed. We lost an officer in that mess,” he shook his head. “I hope to never see that stretch of road again as long as I live,” he shook off the trauma of a hellish campaign to avenge dozens of peace-loving folks.

Tore listened closely and nodded. “It is the burden of those that fight for good and that protect the rest of society. It is a burden that is not easy to carry at times, but I thank you and your men for all that you have done and all that you do on a daily basis. You have my respect as well. As for the men lost, is there someone I can leave some gold with to get to the families and loved ones they have left behind?” Tore kept his tone somber and respectful. He’d seen plenty of terrible things in his life and knew he would see more, so he empathized with Slatestein and his men. He knew their feeling of loss as well, having lost friends over the years.

Slatestein had his own things going on, and Tore noted that the portrait of his wife that previously hung on the wall behind him was no longer there. The human didn’t have to ask, and let the dwarf speak. “Donations to our Memorial Fund would be most appreciated, and I can vouch that the funds *do* go to the families of the departed in service. When possible, volunteer clerics perform *raise dead* rituals, but the Malarians tend to purposefully defile bodies long after killing their victims so that their flesh cannot be raised.”

“If there is anything that I can do to assist you in any matters, please do not hesitate to ask,” he told the dwarf. “And should you need someone to deal with the cultists, I would be happy to try and trim their numbers further for you.”

Slatestein hung on Tore’s words, the case now getting cold after their crestfallen—though successful—mission. He closed his eyes while exhaling through his oblong nostrils, nodding as he opened them, and answering, “I appreciate this offer, and if it is in earnest, I believe there is an opportunity to investigate a local matter alleged to have ties to the Malarians, though the source is anonymous and as of yet unverified. Are you willing to come by tomorrow at this time? I will speak to the officers on that case when they return and if there’s cause to link the two cases, I will have more information by then.”

Tore stated that he had to confer with Saradette, as their fates were bound by faith and honor for the moment, but was interested in pursuing justice against these aggressors. “She’s around the corner at the Gondar Temple. We can come back later today and let you know where we stand on this.”

The Captain covered a few other topics of note, adding that the work he, Saradette, and others had done on behalf of the Barony was commendable. “Though word of your high deeds has been embellished by now, I’m honored to know that even the true story is heroic enough to warrant a scribe’s attention.”

Just then, Saradette entered the Precinct Office, and a knock at the Captain’s closed door preceded her voice.

*Tore has gained the following additional information:*

* *There’s a scribe/bookseller next door to the Precinct Office who would be interested in chronicling the tales of heroes, like the PCs. He’d offer a 4-digit figure in gold, but more importantly, while in and near Mintar, the PCs would gain the benefits of the Renown feat in the Reputation system (Unearthed Arcana), and their Reputation score would be added to Cha-based checks with NPCs (even outlanders) within county limits.*
* *The Baronial Guard has been advised to seek out a worthy entity—be it an individual, a family, a guild, or the like—to oversee a keep on the outskirts of the county. It’s being built, and is intended to serve as a trading outpost for merchants who don’t want to venture all the way to the coast through the rugged woodland, particularly with the threat of Malarian raids. The Captain can connect the PCs with the appropriate point of contact, and they have a standing welcome at the Baron’s Keep.*
* *There’s a new Shrine to Lurue where Tore may find kindred spirits. It’s smaller than the Shrine to Mayaheine (now memorialized), and located between Eastgate and Chatterstreet Market.*

“Ah,” Tore said as he heard Saradette’s delicate tones, “That is Saradette. She must have finished at the temple. We have some other plans, so I will not hold you up any longer. I will be back with that donation for the families of the fallen before we leave town, on that you have my word.”

Saradette held up a small book. “I have to read this and return to the Gondar Temple on the morrow. How did your meeting go?”

Captain Slatestein answered, “It’s still going as far as I’m concerned.”

“Very well,” Tore replied, “Do you mind if Saradette joins us? Perhaps we can discuss that keep on the outskirts of town and what they are looking for. I know Saradette is more organized than I, and could help with the engineering aspects, if needed.”

**A map of land with land and water

Description automatically generated**

They briefed Saradette on what they’d already discussed, and Slatestein pointed them to the Lake of Steam map on the wall, indicating the site of the future keep and providing some background in a file folder that would require a full day’s work to review. “If you’re interested, I can drop your names.” The file couldn’t leave the office, but they were free to spend as much time as they wanted in one of the back offices reviewing the documents within the folder.

*Once read entirely, Immaline’s Knowledge: Local skill and Saradette’s Knowledge: Geography skill will apply to the site of the keep as it has on Mintar. Tore doesn’t have any pertinent Knowledge skills to transfer.*

After all had been planned for the next day, the two heroes took their leave and saw to re-equipping, and possibly some new garments. A spellscale named Vladim ran a tailor shop in Chatterstreet, and was reputed to have a wide selection of ready-made outfits and accessories.

Saradette sold her short sword and bow, but retained her two daggers. “I never use them,” she explained to Tore, “and they’re in the way. When I get time, I will scrap the launcher, and rebuild the blaster and my glove.” She looked for a better quality small wagon that Gadget could pull, instead of the basic cart she had.

Tore was impressed with the expandable compartments, organized tool racks, and a collapsible roof that allowed larger-than-gnomes to venture inside the space. He noted that the Shrine to Lurue was across the street, and proposed to venture in for a few moments for similar reasons that had guided Saradette to the Gondar Temple.

Tore nodded, and decided to slim down things as well. Though he’d been working on his sword, he decided to trade that in as well, opting for the Rod of Defiance. He also exchanged his holy symbol of defiance for a regular, silver holy symbol. The Rod, which was more of a heavy mace, would work as his primary melee weapon and a bane against any undead that they encountered.

As they walked to the other stores, Tore asked Saradette, “What do you think about settling down at the keep for a few months? Overseeing things as well as establishing Mintar’s presence and rule of law in the area? Chase off some of the Malarian cultists as well...” Tore was torn between travelling and staying to help out in a town that he’d grown a slight attachment too. It wasn’t his home, but since he left Neverwinter, it was where he’d spent more time than anywhere else. Then again, traveling was the way of Lurue and her followers.

The gnome thought for a moment, and then she smiled up at her friend. “I like the idea.” She contorted her face into a scowl and crooked her fingers. “I can take over one of the towers and make it into a mysterious laboratory! Lighting arcs out from the spire, and strange noises are heard on dark nights.” Her scowl dissolved into a grin, and she shrugged. “Okay, maybe not, but a permanent workshop would be nice.” Widget sat up on her hind legs and watched for Tore’s reaction to her master’s silliness.

At first, Tore was unsure if Saradette was serious or not, but when she grinned he smiled and replied, “So long as those lightning arcs only hit evildoers, I’m fine with whatever you do in your tower.”

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Earlier…

A person in a red robe reading a book

Description automatically generated

Tore and Saradette were speaking with the scribe next door to the Precinct Office. After a discussion of their respective exploits, the scribe—a human calling himself Emeritus—promised them each no less than 3,000 for a few days’ worth of interviewing. He would fact-check what he could, but would have to publish the manuscripts as fiction based on current events. “We could hold interviews over the next tenday if you’re available.”

“It’s fine with me,” Saradette said. She privately thought that they’d have to discuss what they’d reveal about their captivity.

“Good,” replied Tore. He will let the scribe know where they will be staying, then added, “We will also be going to the site of the new keep along the river. You are welcome to come there and we can speak at length. If you are satisfied and publish the work, I want my portion given to Captain Slatestein next door for the families of the fallen city guard.”

They exited Emeritus’s shop and saw a human with a peculiar bird perched on his finger. The merchant or aristocrat was fancying Saradette’s gadgets, but didn’t bother her as they passed by to get lunch.

A person with a bird on his hand

Description automatically generated

The artificer took note of the man, but she didn’t react otherwise.

As Tore watched the man, he made it clear that he had noticed the individual by looking directly at him and following him as he walked until he lost sight of him.

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After about a half hour of asking around, she found a wonderful cart available, and traded in her 15-GP cart for the 1,500-GP counterpart, which had expansion capacity for extradimensional compartments, though magical augmentations such as these would cost more. The draft-drawn ambulator was made of the highest-quality woods, metals, leathers, and other materials, and displayed masterwork craftsmanship, which would likely make the pony’s pull lighter, and more balanced.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Item** | **Wt.** | **Notes** | **Value** |
| MW Cart | 100.0 | 4 slots large enough for 1 bag of holding each | 1500 |

“This will help us move the supplies we need,” Saradette explained. “While you go to temple, I will look for a couple of scrolls with spells I can use to safeguard the wagon when we’re not around.”

In the midst of the midday multitude, Saradette and Tore passed by the same fellow they’d seen before just outside the Precinct Office. It took them a moment to notice him, as he did not have his bird on him, and now walked briskly by, but Tore thought they made eye contact for a moment.

Upon turning around, neither Saradette nor Tore could see the man in the crowded street.

“What do you make of him?” Saradette looked around as she spoke to Tore.

“He is obviously interested in whatever it is we are up to.” Tore took a moment to look around for the bird. He wondered if the man was some type of wizard or sorcerer with an unusual familiar. “Perhaps the next time we see him, we should make a point of approaching him and confronting him.”

“I do hope that will work out better for us than the last time,” Saradette replied quietly. “Still, you are correct.”

~\*~

Over a year ago...

Saradette stepped outside her workshop, and tugged at her chainmail, settling it in place over her chest. At least she had time to dress and prepare before she was summoned, she thought grumpily. The new trigger mechanism for the launcher sat half-finished on her worktable, but duty called.

The air shimmered around her, and she found herself in a vast, grassy field. The gnome turned in place, and then she gasped in surprise. “Stratus!”

“Hello, love,” the reclining cloud giant said with a gentle laugh that boomed like distant thunder. He smiled as she ran up and climbed onto his arm and chest. “I missed you, Saradette.”

She leaned down and kissed his lower lip. “I’ve missed you, too, Stratus. I didn’t think I’d ever see you again.”

“I had to call in some favors, but I was finally able to summon you here. I wish it was just so we could spend time together, but I’m afraid there’s more to it.” The cloud giant rummaged in his pocket and pulled out a gemmed pendant. “I got you this so we can find each other, no matter where we are. I have the mate to it. It’s supposedly not otherwise detectable.”

Saradette took the pendant and slipped it into one of her pouches. “You were saying?

“The summons is for a friend of yours, Maja, I think? She’s waiting for you, and I need to send you there very soon.”

Saradette sighed. “You’d better summon me back here, and soon.”

“I will, love, I will.” Stratus gently kissed Saradette and sat up. “Be careful, Love.” He lifted a giant-sized scepter and spoke a few words.

The air shimmered again, and Saradette felt a wrenching sensation as she was swept along by the magic. Then, she found herself kneeling on a strange metal floor. She looked up as a woman spoke.

“Saradette? Is that you?”

The artificer saw Maja kneeling a few feet away, next to a closed door. They were in a narrow hallway with smooth walls, pipes running along the ceiling, and doors at both ends. The air smelled strange, and odd, glowing lights lit the hallway in a bluish hue. The engineer wore one of her strange one-piece outfits with black boots. Saradette stood and nodded to Maja. “It’s me, Maja. What is going on?”

“We’re in an asteroid mining colony, and we’re under attack by some strange people with powers that I think are from your universe.” A rumbling boom echoed from somewhere beyond the door. “I think they’re using magic on us!”

“Let me see,” Saradette replied as she drew her blaster.

Maja led the way down more of the hallways until they came to a large cavern, obviously cut by tools of some type; huge ones by the marks in the stone. Near them, four other people dressed like Maja hid behind two large metal wheeled carriages. A third carriage, ahead of the others, burned with an acrid smell.

Across the cavern, Saradette spotted a half-dozen figures in dark clothing. Three of them carried staves, and the other three bore swords and shields. “Drow,” she breathed as she recognized them. “What are they doing here?”

“What are they?” Maja asked.

“They’re drow, a type of elf. They’re good magic users, but they aren’t invincible.”

“Our weapons aren’t hurting them…”

Saradette spied one of the drow mages beginning to cast a spell. “Down!” She ducked behind one of the carriages as a glowing bead raced toward them. The bead struck the front of the vehicle and detonated with a roar. When the fireball spell had dissipated, she jumped up and fired her blaster at the mage. “Shoot them! They can’t keep that up for very long!”

Two minutes later, the battle was over. One of the drow mages was dead, and the other five had vanished through whatever portal they’d use to get here. Saradette had killed the mage herself with her blaster and her lightning glove. Apparently, the shields they’d summoned only worked against the human weapons, but her magic-augmented artifacts were immune to the shields’ effects.

“Thank you for helping us,” Maja said as she stepped up to Saradette. “I don’t know what they want here, but they’ve attacked several outposts in this system over the last few months. Like you saw, we can’t hurt them.”

Saradette handed Maja her blaster and her glove. “Here, take these. They each have forty shots, and they will hurt them. You can also probably use swords or other hand weapons to fight them that way. I will research the problem when I get back home. You can contact Stratus again if you need more help.”

“My shop is over here,” the engineer said as she walked to a door set in the stone wall. It opened when she approached, and the pair stepped inside. “I thought about what you might need, and I remembered that we talked about using methane for heating.”

“Yes, but I have trouble producing it, and the pumps to fill the tanks are cumbersome.”

Maja nodded. “I have a solution for you.” She picked up a cylindrical object the size of a book. “This is a fuel cell. It runs on water, and it produces electrical power. This,” she took up another cylinder about twice as tall, “is a methane synthesizer. Water goes here, and good charcoal goes here.” She pointed to two compartments. “You can make larger hoppers to feed the water and charcoal in, but I’ll leave that to you. Connect these wires like this, and it will run for as long as it has water. Connect this hose to your tank, and it will fill it.” She handed the apparatus to Saradette.

“Thank you, Maja, this is a big help,” the archivist replied. “I need to return home, but I will come back if you need me.”

The pair said their goodbyes, and Saradette contacted Stratus with her pendant. She spent an afternoon with her lover, and then she was returned home.

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Saradette now tugged on her Farspeaking Amulet, and thought to contact Stratus before long.

She turned to Tore. “Would you mind if I visited Stratus for a few hours? I still have work to do this evening, so I’d be back by supper. Unless he’s busy, of course.”

Tore nodded, “That is fine, I will likely spend the afternoon checking out the local stores and see if anyone knows the man with the strange bird. I’m sure one of the Baronial Guards may know of him.”

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While Saradette visited Stratus, Tore meandered across the shopping district for some window shopping. Seeing a member of the Guard, he inquired about the man with the odd bird, giving his descriptions as well.

“Sorry, mate,” the Mintari native shrugged, the description not ringing any bells. “I can’t say that raises any flags. If you’ve cause to suspect someone of malfeasance, you should register a report with the local Precinct Office.”

Tore shook his head, “Nothing like that at the moment. Just a gut feeling is all. However, should you happen to discover his identity, I would greatly appreciate the information.” He then gave a slight bow of his head, “Thank you for your time.” He then continued window shopping, but kept an eye out for the man with the strange bird, or anyone else paying him more attention than appropriate.

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By the end of the day, Tore had spent the afternoon walking the Chatterstreet Market. He was not looking for anything in particular, he just wanted to enjoy an afternoon free of worries, though, he was not off his guard. Besides keeping a lookout for the mysterious man, he was on the watch for pickpockets. He was able to thwart one pair from lifting his pouch at one point, sending the halfling and human child off with a warning that if he caught them again, he would turn them over to the authorities. Though there was a defiant look in the halfling’s eye, the pair went on their way, leaving Chatterstreet for the time being.

As he walked along, Tore stopped and listened to a couple of bards performing a familiar tune. He smiled as he walked away, leaving a couple of gold coins in their collection hat. All in all, it was a pleasant afternoon; though he didn’t buy anything, he enjoyed the window shopping. The only disappointment was not seeing the mysterious man they had seen earlier.

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Saradette returned to the inn, where she’d set up her workshop near the stable. She sat down on her work stool and touched her amulet. She told Stratus about her adventures since they’d last seen each other, and how she wished to see him again. “Maybe I will make enough to afford the spells I need to travel,” she told him at one point. After an hour, the two said their goodbyes, and Saradette turned to refurbishing her two remaining devices.

By the end of the day, Saradette had completed her work, and set up her new wagon. She fabricated a mechanical lock to secure the storage compartments, and considered how she might afford a permanent alarm spell to guard it from thieves. She locked the wagon and went inside to have dinner, bathe, and study the materials the Gondar priests had given her.

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By the end of the day, Saradette had inquired with a fellow arcanist—a fellow named Chartreuse alongside whom she’d fought in the campaign against Borak, a blue dragon that threatened the cities of the Lake of Steam’s northern coastline—on the cheapest way to go about making an *alarm* spell Permanent.



At 500 x 5 = 2,500 gold pieces, she thought it a sound investment, particularly since this was a friend price on account of a favor Chartreuse owed Saradette, and \_\_\_\_\_.

*Spend gold? Normal cost, if I’m understanding canon correctly, is twice this much unless you’re the caster sacrificing the 500 XPs.*

~\*~

Saradette saved her money *[not sure if this means she didn’t buy the Permanent alarm spell for her workshop above]* for use at the new keep, where she’d decided to head, and to upgrade her tools and supplies. The only item she wanted for now was a Rod of *Greater Plane Shift*.

*7th spell level x 13th CL x 250 gp. for 50 charges ÷ 5 use once per day (DMG p. 285) = 13,650 gp.*

~\*~

By morning, one of Chartreuse’s middleman vendors had procured the Rod that Saradette had inquired about, and she was now on her way to the Precinct Office with the magic item tucked away in her vest *[edit as needed]* to reconvene with Captain Slatestein on the matter of the local investigation that might have had links to the Malarian raids. Tore was with her, and they spoke softly as they speculated amidst a crowd of strangers and possible spies.

Tore had stayed out of Saradette’s way while she was working. So as they walked to the precinct office, he asked, “So, have you gotten all of your gadgets adjusted, or will that be waiting until we go to the keep?” Tore was looking forward to getting back into action, as it were, after a few days of rest. Just doing nothing didn’t really suit him.

The gnome nodded. “I added controls to either increase the power output or increase the range to both my weapons. I’ve grown tired of everyone and their sister dodging my shots. This way, I can still fry them whether they dodge or not. I sold my sword and bow, and scrapped the launcher. I wasn’t using them, anyway. I’d like to build something new, but that will have to wait.”