

Shoved Down Deep

The group rushed back to the wagon, the two captured bandits leading the way to ensure they made it back to the road as quickly as possible. Mocha was pacing nervously as they exited the woods and came within sight. Each moment that passed felt like an eternity, the urgency of the situation weighing heavily on them. The sun began to dip toward the horizon, casting long shadows on the ground, and Iris knew they needed to hurry.

When she saw Kaira's condition, Mocha whinnied with concern. *"Iris? What happened?"*

"She's hurt, but she'll be okay, just needs a doctor," Iris reassured her horse, trying to keep her own anxiety in check.

They all worked together to gently load Kaira into the wagon, taking care not to jostle her too much. The woman was still unconscious, which had Iris even more concerned. The two bandits were also placed in the wagon, under Iris's watchful eye while Laken and Gryff quickly hitched horses to the wagon.

Iris rapid-fired orders at her party, her voice tense with urgency, "We need to get to Stilstead as quickly as possible. Mocha, can you stay alongside us? Gryff, hop back here. Laken, you drive. Bree, keep her stable."

Her horse nickered her agreement, and everyone moved with haste, knowing that every second counted.

The wagon sped across the stone bridge, the horses' hooves pounding the solid surface as they raced towards Stilstead. Mocha kept up alongside them, her powerful strides easily matched the slower pace of the other horses as they pulled the wagon. The two and a half kilometers stretched out before them, but they couldn't afford to slow down.

Once they had crossed the sturdy stone bridge, the sound of rushing water faded behind them. The road ahead was mostly flat, which allowed the wagon to maintain a swift pace. Trees and fields whipped past as the wagon rumbled, the party members inside doing their best to maintain Kaira's stability.

Sweat dripped from the horses' brows, but they pushed on, seemingly understanding the urgency of the situation. Laken guided the wagon expertly, avoiding any bumps or obstacles that might cause Kaira further harm.

The wagon finally reached the outskirts of Stilstead, the village luckily not busy as they rushed through the streets toward the inn. As they pulled up in front of the building, the group saw a figure standing outside and Iris instantly recognized the telv knight from Lady Arden's castle. Ser Meredith was flanked by several guards and she seemed to be in deep conversation with a group of villagers, who quickly dispersed as the wagon approached.

Ser Meredith's gaze fell upon the group as Laken jumped down from the driver's bench and the telv's expression shifted from one of seriousness to one of recognition. Her gaze fell on the bound bandits and Kaira's prone form and she nodded to several guards.

The knight stepped forward, her eyes scanning the group with a wary expression. "What's happened?" she asked, her tone stern.

Iris took a deep breath. "We're on a quest for Lady Arden. Kaira was injured in an attack, we need a doctor for her. Bree has stabilized her for now but she is still unconscious."

Ser Meredith's expression softened a little. "I see. I have a medic with my squad here at the inn, she will be able to help your friend. Let's get her inside."

The woman gestured towards the guards who quickly moved forward to assist in transporting Kaira inside the inn under Bree's direction.

Ser Meredith watched closely, her eyes narrowing as she noticed the two men still seated quietly in the back of the wagon. As her gaze fell on Iris, a sudden realization came over her.

"Excuse me, Ser Meredith. Let me speak with my party first and then I'll explain," Iris said, stopping the others before they could follow Kaira inside.

As Laken and Gryff made to follow after Kaira, Iris swiftly reached out, grasping Gryff's arm. "Hey."

Both men halted and pivoted to face her as she let go of the man. With an earnest and grave tone, Iris assured them, "We'll take care of Kaira." She paused, then added, "But first, I need something from the two of you."

The pair exchanged puzzled glances, yet the weight of her words wasn't lost on them. They waited for her to continue, their expressions serious as well.

"You two take the wagon and head back to the bandit camp. Take *everything*. We will sort through it later, but we need evidence. Anything valuable is ours as well. We may need the funds to supply whatever we need to continue the quest."

Gryff's eyes narrowed. "What about Kaira?"

"Kaira is strong, she'll be fine," Iris said with surety. "I will remain here with her, but I need you two to do this." She turned her head to Mocha. "Mocha?"

"*Yeah, boss?*" the horse nickered.

"Can you go with them?" Iris asked.

"*I'll watch over them,*" she assured Iris.

Iris nodded. "Okay, keep a look out for any stragglers, but this is important. Okay?"

Laken nodded with determination. "We cannot leave innocent animals to suffer. It's cruel."

"I couldn't agree more. Search for anything that could give us a clue about what the bandits were planning," Iris instructed.

"Understood. We'll handle it," Gryff assured her, glancing briefly at the inn before turning back to Iris "Watch over her, Iris."

"I will," she promised.

She stepped away from the two and approached the telv knight. "Ser Meredith?"

The woman turned to her.

Ser Meredith took note of the state of Iris's armor, the once-shining metal and fabric tenderly made by Marlena now bloodstained and covered in grime. "I see you've seen your fair share of battle," she commented, her eyes taking in the numerous nicks and scratches on the metal.

Iris shrugged, her expression tired. "We just came from a fight. It's been a long journey so far."

Meredith's gaze softened slightly. "I understand. Does that explain the presence of these two bound men in your wagon?" she asked.

Iris nodded. "They're bandits. I need you to take them into custody while my two men head back out," she explained in a measured tone.

Meredith regarded the two bound men in the wagon with a scowl. "I see," she said, her voice low and serious. "We've been dealing with bandits and other unsavory characters around here lately. These two might be useful in getting to the root of it."

She turned to her guards. "Take these men into custody and see that they are questioned thoroughly," she ordered.

The guards quickly obeyed, escorting the bandits out of the wagon and away toward the village's makeshift jail.

Iris watched them go, feeling a weight lifted from her shoulders. With the bandits out of the way and Kaira getting medical attention, they could finally breathe a little easier.

"I'll need to know whatever you find out," she told the knight, keeping her tone respectful yet unwavering. "It relates to my quest."

Meredith nodded in acknowledgment. "What quest *did* Lady Arden give you? I noticed your companions are all members of the City Guard."

"In return for her full support in establishing the Adventurer's Guild, she tasked me with finding and dealing with the Marauder Prince," Iris replied, before giving a brief overview of her quest and her party.

Kaira's condition weighed heavily on Iris, and she longed to join her inside the inn. However, her duty as the party leader compelled her to continue her conversation with Ser Meredith.

The knight listened attentively as Iris explained her quest, her initial disbelief and surprise gradually giving way to respect. "Lady Arden gave you quite the task," she remarked, her tone filled with respect. "I can see why you and your party are so determined."

Iris nodded, grateful for Meredith's understanding. "I know it won't be easy, but it's something that needs to be done. If you have anything that could assist us, we would appreciate it."

Meredith tilted her head as she fell into thought. "I will provide any information I can to aid you in your mission. In fact, I do have some things from a recent raid on a bandit camp that might be of use to you. I'll have the details sent over to the inn tomorrow."

"Thank you, Ser Meredith. We appreciate all the help we can get," she said sincerely.

Meredith nodded in response before turning to her guards. "Make sure these... *adventurers* have everything they need while they're here," she ordered. "We owe them our thanks for their help today."

Iris felt a sense of relief wash over her, grateful for the knight's cooperation. With their conversation concluded, Iris excused herself and made her way inside the inn, her thoughts consumed with worry for Kaira's well-being.

As she stepped inside, Iris was met with the sound of glasses clinking and people chatting. The warm, inviting atmosphere of the inn normally would have comforted her, but at that moment, all she could think of was Kaira. The old tavern woman behind the bar noticed her looking around and called out, "Hello, dearie! Looking for someone?"

"Yes, my friend was brought in earlier. She's hurt," Iris replied, her voice thick with emotion.

"Ah, yes, Kaira. The village physician and those medics are there with her," the woman said, nodding toward a door at the back of the room. "You can go on in, dearie."

Iris nodded her thanks, rushing toward the door with renewed energy. The sound of her boots hitting the wooden floor echoed as people paused their conversations and watched the armored woman cross the room. Iris hesitated for only a moment before she pushed the door open and stepped into the dimly lit room.

Iris took a deep breath as she entered the room, feeling a mix of relief and apprehension. Her eyes immediately went to Kaira, who lay on the bed with Bree by her side. The village physician and Ser Meredith's medic were tending to her two puncture wounds with great care, and Bree was using a small tool to apply healing goop in areas

the physician requested. Iris could see the concern etched on Bree's face, but there was also a glimmer of hope. Kaira was alive and receiving treatment. That was all that mattered.

As she walked further into the room, Iris noticed the quiet that filled the space. The only sounds were the soft murmurs of the physician and the medic, and the occasional clink of Bree's tool. It was a stark contrast to the chaos and violence they had just experienced, but it was a welcome respite. For a moment, Iris allowed herself to calm down, letting some of the tension that had been building release. Not wanting to interrupt, she leaned against the wall, her eyes never leaving Kaira's still form.

She's going to be alright.

Eventually, her gaze turned to Bree, and she saw the exhaustion in the eyes of her party's medic. Iris knew that Bree had been taking care of Kaira non-stop since the fight. She made a mental note to check on her later. But for now, she focused on the task at hand.

The sun elf wiped at her brow and stepped back as the physician leaned forward with tools to stitch the wound shut.

"Bree, how is she?" Iris asked quietly, trying not to disturb the physician's work.

Bree turned her head to look at Iris, relief washing over her face at the sight of her. "She's stable, but she's lost a lot of blood," she replied in a hushed tone. "The physician is stitching her up now. The healing goop saved her life, Iris. It was so deep. If it hadn't slowed the bleeding..." The woman shook her head. "We need to keep a close eye on her."

Iris nodded, taking in the information. She could see that Bree was exhausted, and she knew that they had all been through a lot. But there was still work to be done. "What can I do to help?"

Bree gave her a small smile, clearly grateful for the offer. "Can you go to the innkeeper and ask her for some fresh water and clean cloths? We need to keep Kaira's wounds clean."

"Of course," Iris replied, pushing off from the wall and moving toward the door. As she stepped back into the common area, she felt a wave of exhaustion wash over her. The events of the day had taken their toll, and she knew that they were far from over.

This was so much easier when it was just me and Mocha. How am I supposed to lead a group if I'm constantly afraid for their safety...

Iris stopped walking, freezing as the realization settled in. She wasn't afraid for all of her party members' safety. Iris had just sent off the men to the camp alone with Mocha. She wasn't worried about Bree. That meant...

Shit. Kaira was right.

Iris recognized that her personal feelings for Kaira were beginning to interfere with her judgment, and she knew that she couldn't afford to let that happen. She quickly pushed those thoughts to the back of her mind, locking them in that deep dark cabinet that held everything back, knowing that she had to remain focused on the task at hand. Any distraction could potentially put her team in danger, and she couldn't allow that to happen.

Iris made her way to the innkeeper, an old telv woman with curly brown hair who looked up from her book as Iris approached. "Can I help you, dearie?"

"We need fresh water and clean cloths for our injured friend," Iris explained, her voice still quiet so as not to disturb the other patrons.

The innkeeper nodded and rose from her chair, disappearing into the back. Iris leaned against the bar, taking a moment to rest. The exhaustion was hitting her hard now, and she couldn't shake the feeling that everything was slipping out of her control.

You've got this, Iris. You can do this.

The innkeeper returned with the requested supplies, and Iris thanked her before making her way back to the room. As she entered, she saw that the physician had finished and was now packing up her tools. Iris handed the bowl of water and cloth to Bree, who began to clean Kaira's wounds with a gentle touch.

Iris stood quietly next to Kaira's bed, watching as Bree worked. She felt a sense of gratitude wash over her for the people she had gathered around her. They were a capable and compassionate group, and they had each other's backs.

She felt herself sway, realizing it wasn't just exhaustion settling over her. Her stamina must have been low from all of the mana used during the fight. She tried to fight it, but her eyes grew heavy, and her movements became sluggish. Bree noticed immediately and motioned for her to sit down.

"Iris, you need to rest," Bree said, placing a gentle hand on her shoulder. "Let me take care of this. You did enough."

Iris wanted to protest, but she was too tired to form words. She sat down heavily on the nearest chair and watched as Bree continued to tend to Kaira's wounds. The sounds of the physician and the medics speaking quietly faded into the background as exhaustion took over, and Iris's eyes slowly drifted shut. She didn't even remember falling asleep.

[Storm Warden – Step 48 attained!]

[Spell – Arcane Torrent now dormant!]

[Spell – Lightning Spear created!]



Iris slowly opened her eyes as she heard her name being called.

I leveled again...

She slowly breathed in and out as she considered the messages that had appeared in her mind. It was the second time she had received a notification, and she'd gone up three levels. *Likely because I created a new spell.*

Iris had always been eager to gain more rushes—or levels and learn new spells in the past, but this time was different. The circumstances surrounding her leveling up were heavy, and it was hard to feel any sense of accomplishment or excitement. Once again she'd needed to create new magic in a situation of life or death.

Only, this time, it wasn't her life in the balance.

"Iris?" a soft voice called out.

Iris blinked, pushing her thoughts out of her mind and focusing on her surroundings. As she looked around, she realized she was on a bench, leaning against a pillow propped up against the wall. She shifted slightly, feeling a soreness in her muscles that suggested she had been in this position for a while. Turning her head to the side, she saw Kaira's face staring at her from the bed, and everything came flooding back. The high elf was awake, her pixie-cut hair mussed and her face pale, but she was giving Iris a soft smile.

"Iris, you're awake," Kaira said, her voice weak but filled with relief. "And filled with thoughts as usual. Are you okay?"

Iris sat up, rubbing her eyes and taking in her surroundings. They were still in the inn, and the room was quiet except for the occasional creaking of the floorboards. She looked back at Kaira, taking in the sight of her awake and alive. It was a relief beyond words.

"How are you feeling?" Iris asked, her voice filled with concern.

"I'm alright," Kaira replied with a small smile. "A little weak, but I'll be fine."

Iris let out a breath she didn't realize she was holding. "Good," she said, relieved. "You had us all worried there for a bit."

"I'm sorry," Kaira said, her voice barely above a whisper. "I shouldn't have let my guard down. Such a rookie mistake."

"There's nothing to apologize for," Iris replied firmly. "You fought like a badass. I'm proud of you."

Kaira's smile widened, and Iris couldn't help but feel a sense of warmth spread through her chest at the sight. She had to admit, there was something about Kaira that drew her in, something that made her feel like everything would be alright.

Her thoughts from the night prior tempered any desire to scoop the woman up and hold her close.

“Is everyone else alright?” Kaira asked, breaking the silence.

“They’re all fine,” Iris replied. “Bree’s been taking care of you non-stop since the fight. Gryff and Laken should either already be back or be back soon.”

“Where are they?” Kaira asked, her smile fading slightly.

Iris examined Kaira’s face, noticing the worry etched there. “I sent them with Mocha to the bandit camp to look for evidence and loot it. It was late when they left, but they’ll be back soon,” she reassured her.

Kaira nodded, her eyes closing briefly. “Thank you for taking care of me, Iris. I don’t know what I would have done without you.”

Iris felt a pang in her chest at the vulnerability in Kaira’s words. “It wasn’t just me,” she replied, her tone softening. “Bree kept you stable until we could get the doctor. The guys transported you on the stretcher. If I’m being honest, I think I did the least...”

“If it wasn’t for you...” The elf sighed and changed the subject. “You ignored my question earlier, are you okay? What were you thinking about?”

“I got another notification,” Iris said, her tone serious. “I’m level forty-eight now. And I got a new spell.”

Kaira smiled. “That’s good, you deserve it. What spell?”

Iris nodded slowly, her eyes falling. “Yeah... **[Lightning Spear]**. The one I used against the bandit leader when...”

Kaira's smile faded, her expression turning somber. “I’m sorry I put you through all of that. You risked so much to help me, and I can’t thank you enough.”

Iris shook her head. “Don't worry about it. You would do the same for me.”

The elf nodded, her eyes flickering with emotion. “But still, I appreciate it. And congratulations on leveling up and getting the new spell. That's impressive.”

Iris smiled weakly. “Thanks.”

They sat in silence for a few moments before Kaira reached over, grabbed Iris’s hand, and squeezed it. “I’m happy you’re here. You had me so worried when you walked into the camp. My heart was racing...”

Iris sat up straighter, her attention fully on Kaira. She felt a weight settle in her chest at Kaira's words. The high elf had been through a traumatic experience, and the fact that Iris had caused her worry only added to her guilt. She wanted to say something but then hesitated, realizing that Kaira wasn’t finished.

Kaira took a deep breath before speaking, her eyes meeting Iris’s. “It’s hard to focus on just the quest and party when I realize how much I care for you.”

Iris's heart skipped a beat at Kaira's words, and for a moment, she was at a loss for what to say. Her mind raced with questions and doubts, but her heart told her that she needed to take a chance. She squeezed Kaira's hand back and leaned in closer.

"I feel the same way," she admitted softly. "But we have to be careful. We can't let our feelings cloud our judgment. It's not just us out there, it's our entire party and the people we're trying to protect."

Kaira's expression turned serious as she nodded. "I know. Trust me. It's just... I remember getting stabbed and all of the regrets hit me at once. Thinking that I would die not..." She hesitated, and Iris could see that the woman was struggling with her emotions. "I didn't want to go without you knowing how I felt."

Iris smiled softly as she gave the woman's hand a squeeze. "I'm glad we both feel the same way."

Iris couldn't help but feel a sense of contentment settle over her as she sat there, holding Kaira's hand.

But her contentment was short-lived as she noticed the tears forming in Kaira's eyes. "Hey, what's wrong?" she asked gently, wiping away the tears with her thumb.

"I'm just... confused," Kaira admitted, her voice trembling. "I've never felt this way before. And with all that's happened, with the danger we're constantly facing... I'm scared of moving forward. What if something happens to one of us? What if I have to choose between you and the others, when my choice could decide who lives?"

Iris took a deep breath, understanding Kaira's fears.

"I know it's scary," she said softly. "But we can't predict the future, Kaira. We can only focus on the present, on the quest at hand, and do our best to protect everyone. And as for our feelings..." Iris paused, taking a moment to gather her thoughts. She knew what she was about to say would be difficult, but it was the best decision for all of them. Tears pricked at the corners of her eyes as she continued, "I think we should wait until the quest is done before deciding anything. That way, we can focus on what's important right now and not let our emotions cloud our judgment."

"And if, when the quest is done, we still feel the same way..." She hesitated, forcing herself to finish the thought. "Then we can talk about it then."

Kaira nodded slowly, her eyes flickering with uncertainty. Iris could feel the tension in the air, but she knew in her heart that this was the right thing to do. They couldn't let their feelings for each other distract them from their quest. Not when so much was at stake.

Kaira's eyes met hers, and Iris could see the hesitation there. But she also saw the trust, the belief that Iris knew what was best.

"Okay," Kaira said quietly, her voice barely above a whisper. "I trust you, Iris. I'm just... tired."

“Good,” Iris replied, giving Kaira’s hand one final squeeze before standing up. “Now, you should get some rest. You need to regain your strength.”

“You’re right,” Kaira said, her voice barely above a whisper. “Thank you, Iris.”

Iris smiled softly. “Of course. I’ll check on you later.”

Kaira nodded again, exhaustion evident in her features.

As she walked toward the door, Iris couldn’t help but feel a pang of sadness. She knew that what she had suggested was for the best, but it still hurt. Her feelings for Kaira were strong, and the thought of putting them on hold was difficult. But for the sake of the quest and the safety of everyone involved, it was necessary. With a final glance at Kaira seeing the woman already sleeping, she left the room and headed toward Reeve Evelyn’s home.



Iris made her way towards the Reeve's House, the familiar surroundings easing her nerves. Her thoughts turned to Gryff, Laken, and Mocha, who had yet to return from the bandit camp. Iris knew she would need to head back to the inn soon, but the thought of sitting idly by and worrying wasn't something she could handle. She needed to take her mind off of all the emotions swirling inside of her, and what better way to do that than to seek out Reeve Evelyn and see if the woman had any quests needing accomplished.

With a deep breath, Iris pushed aside her worries and made her way inside the building.

As Iris stepped inside, she immediately noticed the familiar surroundings. The large open area where Reeve Evelyn received villagers to discuss important business and hold village meetings was just as she remembered it. As she glanced around, her eyes landed on one of the Village Guards speaking with a House Arden guard. The two seemed to be animatedly talking about the bandits the Brightburn squad had captured. Iris wondered what the Reeve thought of the matter.

Speaking of Evelyn, the woman in question noticed Iris's arrival and made her way over. “Iris! It's good to see you again. I didn’t think you would return this soon after the knights arrived,” she greeted with a warm smile.

Iris smiled back, feeling a sense of familiarity wash over her. “How have things been here?”

Evelyn heaved a breath before she replied, “We've been managing. The Harpy threat hasn't gone away completely, and there have been a few random attacks on travelers. And thanks to your warning, we were able to prepare ourselves. Come, let’s sit and talk.”

The woman motioned over to the side to some chairs and led Iris to sit down on them. Evelyn's expression turned serious as she looked at Iris. "How is your friend? I heard she got injured pretty badly. From the two bandits the Arden Guards took to their little makeshift prison, I imagine it had something to do with that. I cannot wait until they are out of my village or hanging from a noose."

Oh damn. Well, at least now I don't need to ask her what she thinks of the prisoners.

Iris nodded. "Kaira's doing much better now. Bree was able to save her life, and the doctor was able to stitch her up. The rest of my party should be back soon."

Evelyn listened attentively as Iris launched into a description of everything that had happened since leaving Stilstead. She told her about the bandit attack, everything that had happened in Brightburn, and their encounter with the hidden bandit camp. When Iris finished, Evelyn sat back in her chair, looking pensive.

"I'm glad to hear that everyone is safe," Evelyn said after a moment of silence. "You've been through a lot, Iris. Are you sure you're okay?"

Iris nodded, though she wasn't entirely convinced herself. "I'll be fine. I just need to keep busy. Do you have any quests that need doing?"

Evelyn sat forward in her chair, her eyes lighting up with an idea. "Speaking of quests, have you heard about our job board?" she asked, leading Iris over to a nearby board where a bunch of papers were stuck to it, each with random jobs needing done. "I remember you mentioning something about it as you described your guild idea."

Iris smiled, scanning the various papers with interest. "Yes, I did. This looks great!"

"It's had a positive reaction with the village," Evelyn explained, a note of pride in her voice. "People have been able to find people to help them with all sorts of tasks. It's been a big help to the community."

Iris chuckled as she saw one about a request to clean up a storage shed and another about a cat that kept meowing constantly at night.

As they were talking, a man entered the building and approached the board. He pulled out a piece of paper and handed a copper coin to Evelyn, who explained to Iris that there was a small fee for posting a job.

Curious, Iris asked the man what the job was.

The elven man, who introduced himself as a farmer, explained that there was a monster beast attacking his livestock and digging up his crops.

"I'm sure you're busy with your own quest," the farmer said, looking at Iris and her still-gross armor with a mix of hope and desperation. "But if you could help me out, I would be eternally grateful."

Iris glanced down at herself and her eyes widened. “I... I completely forgot to clean myself up...”

Evelyn sighed, reaching up to place a comforting hand on Iris’s shoulder. “I had thought that may be the case after you told me your story. Don’t worry lass, we’re a village. Everyone can be a bit dirty at times.”

Iris felt a pang of sympathy for the farmer. She turned back toward him. “Do you have any information on this monster? I might be able to help out.”

The farmer nodded eagerly. “Yes, it’s been attacking in the fields just outside of the village. We’ve tried to scare it off with torches and noise, but nothing seems to work. It’s getting bolder and more aggressive, and I’m afraid it’s only a matter of time before it attacks one of the children.”

Iris nodded, understanding the severity of the situation. “I’ll do what I can to help. Can you give me more specific details on where it’s been attacking and what it looks like?”

The farmer gave her a grateful smile and proceeded to give her more information about the monster. As he spoke, Iris’s expression fell. *It sounds like a Dire Fox, like the one that had attacked the farm where I got Mocha...*

Iris took a deep breath, steeling herself for what might be a difficult fight. “I think I know what we’re dealing with,” she said, her voice determined. “I’ll head out to the fields as soon as I can and take care of it.”

The farmer's face lit up with relief. “Thank you so much! I’ll make sure to pay you a fair price for your services.”

Iris shook her head. “We can figure out a different type of reward. I’m happy to help out the village.”

Reeve Evelyn's smile mirrored Iris's sentiments. “Your kindness and willingness to assist are much appreciated, Iris.”

Iris waved off Evelyn’s praise and turned to the farmer. “I’ll take care of it. Thank you for letting me know. I’ll meet you at your farm as soon as possible.”

The farmer's face broke out into a grateful smile. “Thank you so much. My farm is just outside the village, to the east. It’s the one with the big oak tree in the middle of the field.”

Iris nodded, committing the directions to memory. “I need to check in at the inn first and see if my companions have returned. But I’ll be there as soon as possible.”

The farmer gave her a nod of understanding, and after saying goodbye to Evelyn, Iris made her way out of the Reeve’s House. She shoved her emotions down deep, her thoughts already turning to the task ahead.