

The Blacksmith: Part 4

The doors at the end of the chamber opened with a clatter, and Lana turned to the noise. The woman who walked in was roughly Lana's age, very thin with soft and unmarked hands. She wore trousers and a shirt like a man, but had a long coat that fluttered around her ankles. The woman had short, dark hair that was shiny and well-kept in a bob around her chin.

"My apologies, your majesty," the woman said, walking to the table and taking the last remaining seat. "My work stole time away from me."

"All is well," King Regon said. "We were discussing the staff with the blacksmith. Lana Occor? This is Jada Rommen. She is my court mage."

"Mage?" Lana asked.

"Some small piece of the old ways always exists in Adri," Devron said with reverence. "Mage Rommen has been the magical hand of the king for many years. She is well practiced in the charms and enchantments that the staff requires."

"So it will be a magical staff?" Lana asked.

"To exacting specifications," Jada said. "With all due respect, you can work metal, but the spell craft is my expertise."

"Now, Jada," King Regon gave the woman a friendly smile. "There's no need for such rudeness. Lana Occor is the greatest blacksmith of an age. As you have a talent for magic, she has a talent for metal."

"As long as she can do the work," Jada said. "When do we start?"

"I'll need some time to go over the designs with his majesty," Lana said, pointedly referring to the king. "I can also work with your intentions for the tool."

"Your designs can go through me," Jada said. "I will add my contributions as the design improves."

"Then it's settled," King Regon said. "The two of you can begin your work today, should you like."

"I will need to go back to my shop before the end of the day," Lana said. "I can't afford to be away from the forge for too long."

“It’s just as well,” King Regon said. “Jada will be joining you. We’ve arranged for her to stay in town...close enough to work together, but not an imposition. She has ways of contacting me, and we will work on the project together: the two of you there and me here.”

“With all due respect—” Jada spoke in.

“Taken,” King Regon interrupted, firm. “This is my will, Jada. I will not have it done any other way. Remember your oath.”

“Yes, your highness,” Jada bowed her head. Stiffly, she turned and looked over at Lana. “We’ll begin the design work when you’re ready, blacksmith. If you’ll excuse me, I have to prepare for our work.”

The mage stood and stormed out of the room, keeping upright until she pushed the door open with a heave. A handful of servers lingering by the door scrambled to look busy and avoid the mage's ire.

“Forgive her,” Devron pleaded to Lana. “She worries that her skills are being wasted. She is almost disappointed that peace is coming.”

“Who would think of peace as a disappointment?” Lana asked.

“Jada trained as a war mage before joining my court,” King Regon said. “She is very talented at what she does, but there will come a day when we will celebrate her no longer exercising that power. While you have adapted to a world without war—dare I say, look forward to it—she is eager to use her skills to help the kingdom. Without a war, she worries she’ll be nothing more than a court magician doing parlor tricks for our entertainment.”

“Do you fear she’ll break her oaths to you?”

“No,” King Regon shook his head. “I think she needs more time. The last time the kingdoms were truly at peace was over a thousand years ago. Not everyone will be prepared for what peace could look like in our modern age.”

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The afternoon at the king’s castle was a flurry of details. Armed with stacks of paper and ink, Lana began to design the staff that the king wished her to breathe life into. Time and again, she would send her designs off to Jada through a messenger and enjoy a brief reprieve to take in some refreshments. No sooner than she would begin to relax, Jada’s corrections and criticisms

would come back. The mage defiled Lana's designs with vague details and 'minor tweaks' that upended the entire aesthetic. Her 'axe head' design met orders for more flat surfaces, while the hammer design 'required more edges'. Always, it was either too smooth, too sharp, too big, or not big enough.

As Lana was fit to pound her head against the stone wall, the details became clearer. In the end, the staff did appear as a weapon, but Lana willfully kept the design from being too hazardous. The staff's head was shaped like a cavalry hammer with a flat hammer's face and a sharp point with four flat sides. The pole was as long as the king was tall, and Lana had incorporated some pommel details into the other end. This satisfied Jada enough to send it off to the king, who came back with concise suggestions. The result was an elegant weapon with qualities of a spear and a war hammer. Lana finally accepted these adjustments on the condition that the blade would remain blunt. Everyone involved agreed, though the king more enthusiastically than Jada. Before the tolling of the dinner bell, Lana was in the courtyard again with Devron, heading towards the carriage.

"Jada will be arriving tomorrow morning," Devron said, walking calmly towards the horses. "She will be up most of the night packing away her things like a sullen adolescent, but we'll have her there by morning."

"Where will she be staying? I could meet her there."

"She'll stay at the Shepherd's Crook Inn, though I wouldn't recommend seeking her out. She'll find you tomorrow afternoon. The king will, of course, pay for any supplies you may need for this endeavor."

"I thank him. I'll start working with material samples tonight, and he can review them when Jada's carriage returns from delivering her."

"You'll be up that early?"

"I doubt I could sleep," Lana said. "It has been a long time since the mood to work has struck me like this."

"It is an admirable goal," Devron nodded, opening her carriage door. "A symbol of peace that we may all look to in the future. For the good of all Adri! I dare say this will require an epic

poem of its own...I can see the first few stanzas now: Fair blacksmithing maiden. crafts a staff so fine. Her hands made no weapons, but sought beauty divine."

"Beauty divine?"

"It's still a rough draft. The final version will be better! Rest easy this night, Lana. You have earned that much. Tomorrow, the true work begins."

Lana bowed to Devron again and climbed into the carriage. Traveling back alone, Lana recalled everything that had happened today. She felt alive and excited by the prospect of working with metal. This would require a valuable metal, not common steel. It would need to be something almost holy, but nothing so strong that the staff could be used as a weapon. Metallurgy had once made her mind spin, but now it made Lana eager to put on her blacksmith apron again.