

The Cloak: Part 5

Ariton scowled as he ate his bacon sandwich in the park. He'd been waiting for Lord Daxon to exit the House of Royals since he got to the city around four in the morning. Overnight, he kept moving from the park outside of the House of Royals to the tavern district downtown to the docks. He hadn't slept, knowing that the City Watch would all too eagerly throw him in the drunk cell after beating him senseless. Loitering had been enough to draw the attention of street thugs in the tavern district, and he had to dissuade the women working down at the docks. Ariton was relieved that the sun was finally up so he could at least get something to eat and sit somewhere without drawing too much attention.

Ariton made regular laps between the market and the House of Royals before setting up on one of the public benches in the park with his journal and a bacon sandwich he'd gotten from a market stall. He managed to keep the City Watch from hassling him in the sunlight and finally saw Lord Daxon exit the building in a long coat, dark pants, and a gold-colored shirt that matched his hair. Crumpling up the butcher's paper his sandwich came in, Ariton strode across the park and fell in step beside Lord Daxon.

"You are a deplorable loaf-about; has anyone ever told you that?"

"Ari!" Lord Daxon smiled, putting a hand on Ariton's shoulder. "Wonderful to see you bright and early!"

"It's nearly noon," Ariton grumbled. "I was hoping I wouldn't have to wait so long."

"Well, if you told me you were coming, I would have gotten you a room in the House of Royals."

"If I were welcome there, I wouldn't be skulking around the docks at night."

"Ah, did you meet Narisa?"

"Focus, Daxon! You said you had some information about the Raiments?"

"Yes, of course. Down to business. I've been doing some extra research in the archives. There were four Raiments besides the Cloak of King Desper. Each Raiment comes with an epic poem written on scrolls that are as long as I am tall. They become the tools of great heroes, capable of banishing Plague Spirits and fighting armies. Except for the cloak."

"So you still don't know how it works?"

“Not quite. I think your cloak doesn’t do anything yet. And therein lies the interesting part.”

“You’re far too dramatic. Get to the point.”

“Alright, fine. We know the Great Epics, but I looked back further. There are stories of the origins of the Raiments.”

“They were gifts from the Great Virtues.”

“And then we gave them power. See, humans had the Raiments, but they all shared the same power: the ability to absorb the essence of lesser spirits. With the tools to absorb their powers, the gods tasked mankind with hunting and taking the powers of Plagues: giving mankind the tools to excel without giving one Raiment more power than the others.”

“So when the Five Kings first received the gifts, they weren’t the same as they are now?”

“King Geledon,” Lord Daxon lectured, “the King of the Striding Boots. He fought and defeated the Great Plague, Henidon the Swift. Once he’d destroyed the demon, he took the monster’s agility and was able to use it to fight more Plagues. King Jurro of the Feather Breastplate fought Samsor the Unbreakable and took in the strength of his feather-light scales.”

“And what about the cloak? What Plague did my ancestors kill?”

“They didn’t. That’s the secret of the Cloak of King Desper…it has no spirit that gives it power.”

“So it’s useless?”

“No, it’s unbound. Don’t you see? You have a blank slate to imbue the cloak with whatever power you see fit! There are any number of Plagues left in Penmar. With the cloak, you can siphon their divine powers.”

“Any power I want?”

“I have a long list of active Plague Spirits throughout the land. We can look through it together and we can make the cloak powerful beyond your imagination! Strength, invulnerability, control of the elements! We could do anything.”

“Healing. We make the cloak a tool of healing.”

“Healing? Well, I’d have to check, but—”

“Plague Spirits don’t heal.” Ariton frowned and sat on the stoop of the nearest building. Daxon sat next to him and put a supportive hand on his shoulder.

“It’s a noble reason to want to help people,” Daxon said. “But we can only work with what the Virtues give us, no?”

“What the Virtues give us,” Ariton scoffed. He blinked slowly and straightened, considering the thought. “The Virtues give us—do the texts say it has to be a Plague?”

“Well, no, I suppose not. We’re dealing with translations that have changed languages a few times over the centuries, but it doesn’t call them Plagues. The word they use is ‘Orha’, which—in the oldest tongue—translates to the neutral Spirit.”

“So, it’s not just Plagues that we could catch?” Ariton was looking less for a straight answer and more for confirmation of his own theories.

“What are you plotting? I’ve seen that face before.”

“There are stories I’ve heard of ancient heroes...warriors who are blessed by Great Virtues and their servants. Sometimes, in dire moments, the great spirits can come down from the heavens and heal a hero so he may complete a noble quest.”

“Ah, so you want to find a Virtue to heal someone?”

“No, I want to take the power of a Great Spirit.”

“Ariton—”

“Dax, I’m asking as a friend. I need you to go into the archives and search for the known locations of any Spirits that have been known to heal. Then I need any information you have about how to bind their power to the cloak. The Cloak of Healing...with it, we can decide who is worthy of divine healing.”

“You want to trap the power of a Great Virtue? Use the very tool they gifted your ancestors against them?”

“It doesn’t have to be a Great Spirit. I just need a Spirit that heals people...preferably illnesses, if you have to get specific.”

“It won’t bring your father back. That’s asking too much of the Virtues.”

“It doesn’t matter anymore. You know why I need this.”

Lord Daxon sighed and nodded. “I’ll see what I can do. The Archivists are going to hate me for giving all their hoarded information away for free.”

“One more thing: I’m worried about the Order of Saint Mansin.”

“I shouldn’t wonder if you’re planning to kill a Great Virtue!”

“No, not like that. They know that I’m looking to unlock the powers of the cloak. They sent someone after me. The same someone who killed my father.”

“The epic writes itself!” Daxon beamed. “The poetry of this will become its own saga!”

“If we live to see the end of it. If you start poking around the legends of Great Spirits, it will raise some eyebrows no matter what.”

“Understood,” Lord Daxon said. “Don’t let them find out what you’re planning.”

“Or you can find out what *they’re* planning,” Ariton said. “The assassin told me they want to imprison a Plague, but that sounds outside of the cloak’s ability. They tracked me down, so they have the advantage. If they come to you, asking questions—”

“I’ll see what I can get from them. I daresay, this is turning into something much more interesting than your ‘idle’ fascination with history. Subterfuge, skullduggery, lying to the Order...not very princely behavior.”

“I’ve done terrible things trying to help as many people as I could. Now, it’s time to be selfish.”

“Careful, Ari. People don’t like when you finally start acting selfish.”

“That’s because I finally start saying ‘no’ when they ask. You know the kind of power that carries.”

“I’ll find you when I have more information.”

“You know where I’ll be.”

Ariton stood and walked back to the park, a slight spring in his step. The cloak had been a burden for so long, weighed down by years of what it meant to his royal line. Now, for the first time, it felt light and hopeful.