Chapter 120

After classes on the fifth day, I went to the free clinic to practice my lesser restoration spell.  The free clinic for Aegis City was outside the walls in one of the smaller towns.  The town was a two-mile walk from the city gates, and I decided to go alone but traveled invisibly.  I needed to work on increasing my spells to continue to evolve them.

The town reminded me of Hen’s Hollow but larger.  There were also fewer surrounding farms, and it smelled horrendous.  This town was responsible for tanning the hides procured from dungeons.  I knew where the clinic was from the map Neelan had given me.  I entered with a knock.  A young young woman turned from a patient.  She looked me over with a bright smile, “How can we help?  We only have one mage who visits every third and fourth day, but we have several locally brewed minor potions.”

I studied the young woman, maybe four years my senior, with a symmetrical oval face and a large smile. Her dark hair was wound into a tight bun. Large hazel eyes studied me, waiting for an answer. I offered her my letter of introduction, “Mage Neelan sent me here to help.”

Her eyes went wide as she read the letter.  She looked at me, “And you are going to heal for free?  My name is Ophelia.”  She held out her hand, and I shook it.  “I take care of the patients that are too sick to go home. We have four patients here and seven more around town.”

I then went around healing bones, infections, and some minor poisoning.  With each patient, Ophelia’s smile got larger and larger.  After the tenth patient, she asked, “How much aether do you left?  Old Man Striker is the last person who needs serious healing.  His shack is out on the Arm—a small finger of land on the edge of the island.”

I had actually been fairly disappointed with the number of people available to heal.  The extent of healing had been relatively minor as well.  “I can fix teeth, remove scars, and correct poorly healed bones and joints.  I am a High Mage.  Bring anyone who wants my services today.  I will not return in the future.”

“High Mage?” She looked at me with some doubt but nodded.  Soon, I had a line of townsfolk.  Repairing the teeth was the most common ask.  Once one person’s teeth were repaired, they ran off to tell everyone they knew.  I worked well into the evening to the gratitude of the people.  Ophelia told everyone whom I healed my name, ‘High Mage Storme.’  I did not mind, and maybe it would give me some acclaim.

When my aether pool was down to roughly ten percent, I halted the healing.  There were only a few left in line.  I announced, “I have enough aether to heal three more.  Of the remaining,”  I counted, “eight people, please choose the the three most needing healing amongst you.  Any argument and I will heal no one.”

Ophelia, who seemed to be respected, stepped in and moderated.  After a moment, a child was first.  His arm had healed crooked.  It was an easy fix.  Next was an old woman who had no teeth.  I gave her a full set of new teeth.  The last was a middle-aged man.  He had been having abdominal pain for months.  I checked, and he had parasites in his intestinal tract.  I had to merge my cleanliness spell with my lesser restoration spell to cleanse his bowels.

Ophelia shuffled the five unfortunate who did not get healing away, “Thank you, High Mage!”  She bowed.  “Will you come back again in the future?”

“No.  I will visit the other clinics over the next few weeks, but I will head out to the Arm and visit Old Man Striker,” I answered the young woman.

“Really?” Her ever-present smile was there. “I will walk you there, it is about two miles.” As we walked, Ophelia seemed unsure of herself but asked a question, “Why are healing people?”

“I thought I could do some good, and it helps me work on advancing my spell,” I answered cheerfully. We reached the edge of the island and a rock outcropping was there with a small stone shack.

Ophelia explained, “One of the old spotter stations. They are not used any longer, but Striker moved in and just lives there.”

The Arm extended about sixty feet out and was fifteen feet wide. Walking up the textured rock in the stiff breeze made me want to get some type of flight in case I ever fell. It was an amazing view of the colorful lowlands. I knocked on the door and heard some shuffling inside.

“What?” Came a gruff voice.

“I am High Mage Storme. I am here to offer free healing,” I responded.

I waited, and the man inside the small ten-by-ten shack moved around and opened the door. The odor of an unwashed body assaulted my senses. In response, I activated my cleanliness spell, clearing the air. “May I come in?”

Ophelia had not walked out on the Arm, and I couldn’t blame her. The man before me was thin of bone and hair. His eyes were slightly milky with cataracts. He moved aside, and I quickly cleaned everything in the small room. A bed, toilet, and shelf with an assortment of items on it. “May I heal you?” I asked after I was finished cleaning.

“You can proceed,” he said with mild hope.

I produced a jug of syrup from my dimensional space. His body was going to need the energy, and I he greedily drank the fluid, understanding its purpose.

The old man was a mess. I started with his eyes, cleaning up his vision, and he blinked rapidly as I healed them. I worked on his liver next, as that was in serious need of attention. His body had a lot of scars from burns, so I removed them all. I moved from problem to problem. He had a lot of improperly healed bones. Old age and battle had ravaged the man, and I was surprised he was still alive. When I finished, I asked, “Why are you living all the way out here, Striker?”

He chuckled, still feeling out his body and licking his new teeth. “Wow. I have not felt this good in decades. High Mage?” His clear eyes focused on me. “I thank you for your efforts. I came out here to die decades ago but just seem not to have found the time to get around to it. The girls from the village bring me food, and I just seem to wake up every morning.” He laughed at his own joke.

“Your injuries were extensive. What did you do before you came out here?” I asked the man who was still testing out his body.

He focused back on me, “What? Oh, I was a skyship captain—the Endeavor. A merchant that traveled between the lowlands and Aegis City before being crashed by a pesky black dragon. Left me my body broken and with a coin to my name. Got some healing in the lowlands and made my way back to Skyholme. My property had been seized because I was four years behind on taxes. I found this shack and curled up to pass away my final time.”

“Striker, I am glad I could help.” I produced some prepared food from my dimensional space for him. “I hope you find a new purpose to continue. Your body may be old, but your mind is still sharp. The Triumvirate is opening trade with the Sadians, so there is the opportunity for a skyship captain.” I reached out, and he shook my hand. “The healing will have been taxing. Eat a lot more in the next few days, Striker.”

He looked younger but still old. I was not going to offer him a job as he had given up on living, and I did not want to employ someone who gave up so easily. However, I could understand why after I had to use almost all my aether to heal his extensive injuries. I left his stone shack and walked off the Arm.

Striker followed me out and watched me go. Ophelia stared wide-eyed at the old man she had been bringing food to for years, “If you continue to do this, you are going to be the most popular person in Skyholme,” she said with her beaming smile.  I smiled back because I thought my popularity among the common people make Loriel slightly angry.

I walked back to the city, smiling the entire way. At the Shiny Platinum, I called Cilia and Leda on the comm stones to get ready to leave.  We would go and stay at the Black Spire tonight.    Cilia answered, “The ship is ready.  Remy is having the last of the crates loaded now.  Mera is looking for you as well.”

“I will be down with the cats in an hour,” I told her and went across the hall and knocked.

Fera answered and opened the door wide to let me in with a massive smile.  Mera was cooking dinner.  “Storme!  We talked to my brother, and he is willing to work your farm on the capital island!”

Fera added, “He is excited about it.  They just had a baby and wanted to get their own place.”

Mera and Fera looked at each other and asked, “How much does it pay?”

“He will be working the barley field.  So, twenty gold a year and housing plus bonuses based on the harvest.  I know living in the capital island is much more expensive. So I can also give him the opportunity to purchase goods in Hen’s Hollow, and I will have Cilia transport them once a month,” I laid out my terms.

Mera and Fera looked at each other, Fera spoke, “That is most favorable. We will tell him tomorrow!”

“Excellent. He will have to get along with the Wolfsguard working the aether fields and orchards,” I added, and the twins affirmed that would not be a problem. “He can live in the Black Spire until the farmhouse is renovated then.”

I left the excited twins and did my evening routine with the cats. When I boarded the Maelstrom, I was shocked to find the cargo hold half full. Remy was checking a crate of blankets. He looked up, “I think I got everything they will need. Getting enough for fifty-nine people is taxing!”

“Good job, Remy.” I went to the bridge, the cats bounding beside me.

Cilia, Leda and Isla were on the bridge, and we were in the air shortly. I told them, “I need the delve team to be brought to the Black Spire. Everyone. We have the Progenitor Dungeon to ourselves tomorrow, and I will be going in with the team.”

I wanted to test the new dungeon and see its difficulty level. Hopefully Ullmark was still alive after confessing his sins to the Wolfsguard. Isla had some sketches of the new smaller warehouse on the plot of land adjacent to the Shiny Platinum. I looked at them but only cared about the exterior aesthetic value of the building. The cost estimates to construct the building gave me a headache.

The two Harbingers were in the cradles as we flew over the Spire. The Navy was working on repairs to one of the cradles that one of the ships was in. The grounds had been cleaned by the Wolfsgurd. Bushes were cut back, the grass trimmed, and debris removed. We continued onto the farmhouse and set down. Remy ran off to get the Wolfsguard to help unload his crates. Isla went off to do some survey work and set up a delivery site for the stone she was having delivered. Everyone was busy.

When a dozen Wolfsguard arrived, they made quick work of the crates, and Remy was excitedly handing out things from the crates. Cila and Leda went to collect the dungeon team, and I asked Asger, “Asger, where is Ullmark?”

“The human is in the Black Spire, I think. I do not think he found what he was looking for when he spoke to our elders,” Asger admitted.

“I am going to find him then. I hope the efforts of Remy are being well received.” I paused, “Asger, I am going to talk with the Wolfsguard on Stonefell Island. There are some wolfkin women there caring for the half-breed children. Can you come with me on the seventh day?” I asked. Having Asger with me would make it easier when I approached them and asked if any would like to join Asger’s community. I was planning to offer the Wolfsguard the opportunity to have children under the protection of the Black Spire.

“I can come, but I am fairly disconnected from Wolfsguard. I do not think they would listen to me,” he admitted while loading some items into a backpack.

“It is more for you to make them of your living conditions. I am hoping to recruit some more Wolfsguard who may want to retire,” I said to a nodding Asger.

As I was about to leave, Asger grabbed my arm, “Thank you, Storme. I wanted to know we appreciate your efforts. I also wanted you to know four Wolfsguard among us served Otieno Bricio. They have disappeared, and I know they have no love for you no matter how much you do for us.”

“Understood, I will remain on guard, and if you can, please see if you can capture those four,” I said confidently. Four Wolfsguard hiding out there that may want to do me harm was not good. I needed to get Bleiz back to watch my back.

I was on guard as I went to the Black Spire to talk with Ullmark. Ullmark was on the fourth floor with the blown-out windows. He saw me approach, “You know, in all my time serving the Bricios, I never came up to this floor?” He was looking out at the Skyhold city in the distance. “It is really a marvelous site.”

I sat next to him in some chairs he must have brought up, “Did you find the answers you were looking for?”

Ullmark grunted, “No. The Wolfsguard farmers did not care what role I played. They seemed to think someone else would have if I had not done it. No absolution yet.”

“I am going to be visiting the female wolfkin that are still in Skyholme. You can seek your penance there. But tomorrow, we are going into the Progenitor Dungeon. I need you to lead them. They should arrive sometime this evening.” He nodded at my request but did not speak.

I left the brooding Ullmark and walked down the skyship cradles with the two Harbingers. A man in a captain’s uniform greeted me, “High Mage.” He bowed, “I was at the reception for the Sadians. Thank you for your service to Skyholme. We have everyone off of the ship to the right, and the ingots are in the control room for your work. We will not disturb you. After you finish, we will move to the other vessel so you can work in peace.”

My aether was still recovering from the healing, so I tempered his expectations, “I will begin in the morning. Just give me a tour of your vessel.” The captain nodded, and the ship was old but well cared for.

I used my metal sense and was a little shocked at how thin these runes were. They might have started to fail or become unreliable in another two or three hundred hours of heavy use. “This ship does not see a lot of times in the skies, I assume?”

The captain nodded, “She was in the reserve docks. She took flight in the Sadian attack and when the Briocis revolted. Other than that, she has not been in the skies other than to make her way to your Black Spire.”

“Why has she been grounded?” I asked, feeling out more runes.

“It is her aether cannons. They were poorly designed and drew too much aether. Since they are embedded into the hull, building new hulls is cheaper than replacing the cannons on this one. Same with the other ship,” the captain noted. I walked to the cannons and studied the runic patterns.

“Do you have the original runic books for these cannons? I will need them by tomorrow if I am going to make sure they are in good working order.” I said, seeing some things I really liked. With mithril and adamantine, I could downsize these cannons for the Maelstrom.

“I will send a runner to the city for them, High Mage. We were told to do whatever we could to assist.” I nodded and continued my inspection. They had enough gold and platinum to do the work. Everything was in order.

I noticed the Maelstrom was returning and landing near the Spire, so I went to great my delvers. Ullmark was outside as well and had a mask of cheer on. We had fourteen delvers and Ullmark. Talia was the first down the ramp, followed by Sammie and Lana. A lot of unfamiliar faces were mixed in as they approached Ullmark.

Ullmark sounded joyous, “Okay, you lot, we have a new challenge tomorrow! The famous Progenitor Dungeon. And we have it for the entire day. That means you need to find a room and get some rest as we start our delves at mid-night!”

Some awe, excitement, and apprehension at the Spire and the magnitude of everything being thrown at them. Talia took over and guided the group into the tower to get them settled. It was going to be a very busy day tomorrow. The cats followed me onto the Maelstrom. I would get my short rest in my cabin.