**Chapter 24 Gareth Part 2**

The next two days were difficult for Gareth as his mind was distracted. Callem kept getting on him but it didn’t help Gareth refocus. Storme had scored multiple times in sparring and it made him insufferable. When the morning of the 6th day finally arrived Gareth raced to Hen’s Hollow to bring back Freya. She would stay with Storme, Callem, and Wynna for the two days that Gareth would be gone. Callem thought Gareth was going to the capital of Titan’s Shield and not the capital city of Skyholme, Skyhold. It was not a lie as Gareth would have to stop in the capital on the way to Skyhold.

Gareth didn’t spend much time getting Freya and Monty, rushing them back to Callem’s farm. He talked with Storme briefly going over the plan bullet points as he took the purse containing 111 platinum, 6 large gold, and 25 gold. Gareth had plenty of time to get to the docks in Hen’s Hollow for the transport to the capital on Titan’s Shield. He arrived and had to wait nearly 40 minutes for departure which was very awkward as Storme’s father was there. Caleb, Storme's father, kept trying to make conversation, asking what Gareth was planning to do in the city and asking how Storme was doing. Gareth felt guilty not telling the truth to his inquiries. Finally, the ship was ready to leave and he paid his five large copper for transport to the capital. Thankfully Caleb was not assigned to the trip.

Gareth made his way to the rail to watch as the ship lifted and drifted across the land. Gareth was hypnotized by trees, rivers, towns, farms, and roads passing below him. Other passengers also watched from the rails and the trip ended far too soon for Gareth. The capital of Titan's Shield was much more impressive than Solaris, the city near Hen’s Hollow. This city had many more buildings and they were much taller, some reaching ten stories into the sky. The large number of people he saw wandering the streets just before the ship landed in port mesmerized him. A typical day in the capital was just as crowded as the carnival had been at its peak. He looked for the dungeon's entrance but could not orient himself before the ship nestled down between the buildings.

He was a bit lost as he disembarked but since he was on the airship docks it shouldn’t be too hard to find the right ship to reach the capital island. After asking a few questions he found a passenger transport to the capital. There were actually three ships headed there today in the next few hours, two were headed to the lower city and one to the upper city. He figured the upper city would get him closer to the trade district with the best shops so he got a ticket for that liner. The cost was five large silver! That seemed excessive to him but the dock master said the ship was faster and more comfortable, so he paid. It would also save him a half-mile walk from the lower city to the upper city. He only had a rough map from one of his textbooks and Storme said the best course was to just walk straight to the trade district directly from the docks. Everything he needed would be there.

Even though Gareth was in his best clothes he got a lot of disdainful looks from the other passengers. He bore with it and went to the wide bow of the skyship, ignoring the pompous people denigrating his appearance. He stayed on deck the entire time and watched the island fall below as the ship took off the ground. His stomach dropped as the speed was much faster than his previous transport. Soon the vessel cleared the edge of the island and the vast world far below appeared.

It was tiny as they were miles up but Gareth studied the lands below with intense interest. A hunger for exploring the unknown lands below grew within him. Time passed too quickly for him again as he gazed and the ship was flying over the capital island now. The ship passed over large country estates. Some were academy compounds and some were estates of the wealthy. A few small orchards, vineyards, and fields dotted the land. Even the forests and lakes seemed groomed to act as boundaries to various estates. The ship passed over a small city with white stone buildings and tiny people walking the streets. It was not the capital of Skyholme, just a vast urban expanse of the capital. Gareth looked up and the capital city etched the horizon with impossibly tall buildings silhouetting the skyline.

From his lessons he new magic reinforced the stone letting them extend buildings hundreds of feet into the sky. The opulence and enormity of everything made Gareth envious but he knew from readings most buildings were from the avian race that once inhabited the island. The tall buildings had been renovated by the Skyholme people but the architectural legacy could still clearly be seen. The ship lowered and landed on a port building near the trade district in one of the urban districts just outside the center of the city. Tall buildings surrounded Gareth and he felt very small.

Gareth disembarked and walked straight to the trade district as a deckhand indicated the way. Pairs of smartly dressed, large, and imposing city guards walked the streets. Dozens of well-dressed men and women walked the streets and Gareth got looks of disdain. Gareth traveled as far off the main concourse as possible. At least the presence of the guard pairs made him feel somewhat safe carrying around the small fortune. His goal today was just to get some new clothes to pass as a rich noble’s son. He would then stay in a fine inn tonight and enjoy the comforts of the city. Gareth refocused, ok Storme said the most important thing to impersonate a pompous ass of a noble was to act like one. Gareth straightened and started walking down the street and soon found a tailor shop in the heart of the trade district that seemed to specialize in men’s clothing. He entered the shop and found one man being fitted for a long coat by a male tailor and immediately another tailor approached him from behind a desk. The tailor was old and partially bald but had a friendly smile.

“What can we do for you today young sir.” The man was evaluating Gareth, sizing up his potential sales. At this point, the man probably didn't think much of his possible fortunes.

“Good man,” Gareth said. “My family has sent me to the city to get some outfits for my sister’s wedding. I have been training in seclusion for three years and just now my father thought I should rejoin the family functions. I need an everyday outfit and one for the wedding.” It was a story Gareth thought sounded plausible. The man looked at him again reassessing his initial appraisal.

“What is your budget?” he finally asked. Storme had told Gareth to spend at least 100 gold on each outfit. Gareth pulled out three platinum coins and placed them on the counter to which the man just raised an eyebrow. Was it not enough, or too much?

“My father gave me a little more but I wanted to see what you have to offer first.” The man nodded and smiled. He pulled the coins into his hand and quickly inspected the three shiny coins before placing them in his pocket.

“Ok you want one formal outfit and what about the second?” The man asked.

“Just casual clothing for going out in the city but something that I can move freely in. I don’t know what the current fashions are but I want to fit in with the capital’s aristocracy while I am here.” Gareth said.

“Very good. Let us start in the back room, with me please young sir.” Gareth followed him to a private room. “Please strip to your underclothes.” Gareth complied and was standing in his underwear. “Ah yes, new underclothes as well?” He asked and Gareth nodded slightly embarrassed. First, the man took many measurements, some times the man's hands across his body made him a bit uncomfortable. When finished the man brought out three under shirts in different materials for Gareth. "We have common cotton, trap door spider silk from the local dungeon, and dungeon linen from the lands below." Gareth was drawn to the spider silk shirt and the tailor read his eyes, “fantastic choice. The shirt has some elasticity and can be enchanted with silver runic thread. It is extremely durable and should last you many years. We offer the comfort enchantment and the temperature management enchantment. Are you interested in one or both?” Gareth was tempted to ask how much but that would reveal his ignorance, so he just said both. He decided on a light gray color for the shirt and somehow he agreed to get three undershirts, four pairs of underwear, and eight pairs of socks in the same material all with both enchantments.

Next, the man brought out shoes, “The best way to build an ensemble is from the ground up. You will want light boots for the city walking and some shoes good for dancing for the wedding.” A parade of shoes in various styles and colors was shown to him. He decided on the simplest designs for both the boots and shoes made from a dark brown leather that the man said was from the dungeon monster called the giant terror mole. He just got the comfort enchantment on the shoes and boots.

With the shoes chosen the tailor put together a complete dress outfit for the fictional wedding as Gareth tried to hurry him through the selection process. It included pants, a decorative belt, and a decorative scabbard for his dagger, a long-sleeved shirt, a vest, a long coat, a fashion scarf, a low-brimmed hat, and silver bands to go around the wrist and hold his sleeves in place. To the tailor’s disappointment, Gareth declined to get any of those items enchanted saying he only planned to wear the outfit once.

The casual clothes the tailor selected were light brown pants in the current fashion made of a mix of leather and linen that made them heavy and durable. He didn’t get any embellishments on the pants but did get both enchantments they offered. For the shirt, he went with a loose-fitting white shirt that buttoned up the front. The buttons were made from silvery ivory bone. Well, he had a selection of buttons put before him and those looked the most attractive to his eyes. Gareth ordered both enchantments for the shirt. For a coat, he went with a long coat, similar to a duster from the old west. It was dark gray and made from the hide of a stone auroch from the lowlands. It was thick and a bit heavy. With the enchantments, the tailor assured Gareth the coat would be extremely comfortable.

After going through about a dozen hats Gareth picked out a hat that resembled a fedora made of the same material as the duster. With the long three-hour process done it was time to pay and Gareth was extremely thirsty. The tailor moved to the counter and started to write out the invoice.

Trap Door Spider Silk Under Shirt, Light Gray x 3 15 gold

Trap Door Spider Silk Underwear, Light Gray x 4 16 gold

Trap Door Spider Pairs Socks, Light Gray x 10 10 gold

Terror Mole Shoes, Dark Brown x 1 30 gold

Terror Mole Boots, Dark Brown x 1 40 gold

Yak Deep Blue Dress Shirt x 1 8 gold

Rock Wool Off Deep Blue Dress Pants x 1 10 gold

Giant Badger Leather Hide Dress Coat x 1 15 gold

Giant Silk Worm Black Vest x 1 5 gold

Tellomere Yellow Scarf x 1 25 gold

Constrictor Low Brimmed Hat x 1 3 gold

Fine Leather Belt and Scabbard x 1 11 gold

Silver wristbands x 2 8 gold

Durable Leather/Linen Pants x 1 3 gold

Linen Long Sleeve Shirt, White x1 1 gold

Ivory Buttons x 16 8 gold

Auroch Long Cloak, Dark Gray x 1 20 gold

Auroch Brimmed Hat, Dark Gray x 1 5 gold

Comfort Enchantments, Standard Silver Thread x 23 46 gold

Temperature Management Enchantments, Standard Silver Thread x 21

42 gold

Multiple Enchantment Discount -21 gold

Total Invoice…………………………………………………300 gold

Gareth hid his astonishment. The total was exactly what he had given the man before the fitting and selection. He knew he was being taken advantage of, it was painfully obvious. The tailor spoke, “We can have the garments ready in three days and delivered to your residence.” Gareth was about to ask ‘and how much for that service’? But he held it in.

“I need everything by tomorrow morning. Can you also add on another Auroch Long Cloak?” His tone was firm and not voiced as a question. The tailor backed a step up looking a little embarrassed.

“Sorry good sir but our weaver enchanter is quite busy. If you wish to forgo the enchantments we might be able to have everything ready in the morning.” He was trying not to upset Gareth, that was obvious by his mannerisms. Gareth reached into his pouch and placed another platinum coin on the counter.

“And now?” Gareth intoned with casual curiosity. It was Gareth's attempt at being a rich pompous noble. The man was staring at the coin and the gears in his head were turning.

“Give me a few minutes to discuss this matter with the master tailor and the weaver enchanter.” The tailor hurried out a door in the back and Gareth had to wait twenty minutes for him to return. The tailor seemed a little out of breath when he returned but said, “I have excellent news. We can expedite the items you have selected and add on the additional cloak. The charge for the cloak with be just 20 gold, and the enchantments will be free. The expeditious completion of your order will be 80 gold as we will have all eight of us working overnight to complete everything.” Gareth nodded, not expecting any other result after seeing the greed in his eyes. Gareth was growing up quickly.

“Can you recommend a good inn nearby? I will stay there tonight and you can drop my clothes off as soon as they are completed.” The man didn’t take but a breath to reply.

“The Gentle Tauren is just three buildings down on the left. Tell the innkeeper, Broderick, that you were sent by Danlius. He will take good care of you.” Gareth thought ‘sure he will.’ He was quickly becoming cynical. “And your name sir?” It was strange in the entire period Gareth had not given or received the man’s name until now.

“Gaston,” Gareth said. He didn’t want to use his real name and that was the first thing that came to his head. Gareth left, finally free of the tailor, and planned to never go through that ordeal again. Shopping for clothes was exhausting, boring, and painful to the purse. At least the money wasn’t his.

He made his way to The Gentle Tauren. The inn was four stories tall and made of the same white stone common throughout the city. Inside the common room were neatly aligned tables, a bard strumming a small harp near a large quiet fireplace, and three attractive waitresses waiting near the kitchen door to serve patrons. A few patrons were eating and drinking throughout the room. A slightly overweight and average-looking man stood behind the bar. He had salt and pepper hair but after just a moment of studying the man, Gareth knew he was a skilled warrior. The pudge on the man hid muscles and his dark eyes were observing everything inside the inn’s common room, including Gareth. Besides the cleanliness and brightness of the room, it was what he had expected. Well, the serving women were more attractive than he expected. Gareth walked to the bar, “Broderick?” The man nodded, “Danlius sent me,” Gareth said.

The man laughed instantly, “Really? I am absolutely shocked that old fart sent someone to my establishment again. You still got your invoice on you?” Gareth nodded a little as he was caught off guard as the man made a gesture to hand it over. Gareth did so reluctantly and the man scanned it.

After he read it twice he handed it back to Gareth. “Not too bad boy. I used to be a dungeon delver in my younger years and I supplied many monster and beast carcasses to tailors throughout Skyholme. The last man that came through here from Darious, well let us say I told him the truth about how much he overpaid.” A pit was descending in Gareth’s stomach. Broderick continued, “Oh it's not too bad. The materials for what you have listed would amount to around 80 gold…well maybe a little more with the trouble we have been having getting imports from the lowlands. So let's say 100 gold for the capital. The tailor should get around 40 gold for his work and the enchanter about the same. So a good price would have been 180 gold. I take it you didn’t haggle.” Gareth shook his head no and the man laughed again. “Well unless you are made of coin take it as a life lesson boy.” He produced a glass mug and filled it with a foamy beer that Gareth drank immediately. The beer was excellent, cold and nutty, flavorful. “My own brew. Well, my own recipe anyway. I don't dabble anymore.” The man said.

Gareth sat at the bar. He wasn’t going to tell Broderick he paid another platinum to get the clothes in the morning. “Can I get a room, dinner now, and breakfast first thing in the morning?”

“Sure! We are between lunch and dinner in the common room but I have pheasant pies ready to go into the oven. Or you can order something. I would suggest our boar cheeseburgers.” Gareth had eaten dozens of burgers and was almost tempted to tell Broderick that his friend had invented the cheeseburger.

“The pheasant pie sounds fabulous, and two of your boar burgers as well,” the innkeeper's eyes rose in mild surprise but just nodded and went to the kitchen. He returned shortly and positioned himself in front of Gareth.

“So what type of room are you looking for? The only rooms we have with any view are on the fourth floor, two of them are open right now.” The man patiently asked.

“No, something simple is fine but I would prefer a bath after dinner, is there a bathhouse nearby?” Gareth asked.

“Bathhouse? Not in the upper district. All buildings here have their own running water and all my rooms have showers…a few have baths too.” Gareth felt he had just blundered. He was coming across as an ignorant farm boy.

“Just a room with a shower is fine. Can I get another ale?” Broderick smiled and got him the ale and a silver key. He noticed the three waitresses were watching him and talking to each other. What was that about?

Soon a large dinner plate-sized pie was in front of him. He dug in and the flaky crust, smooth thick gravy, hearty meat, and vegetables filled him up. Before he realized it two massive burgers were on plates to his right. Broderick had stepped aside to let him eat and a short waitress with blonde hair had delivered the burgers. Gareth made it halfway through the second burger before reaching his limit. He had been receiving refills on his cup during the meal as well. “Room 6 on the second floor,” Broderick said as Gareth slide off the stool and stumbled a bit. He had enough sense to wander toward Broderick.

“Can I pay for the meals and room now? I might leave early in the morning.” Gareth felt the alcohol working. He had never drunk so much before and he was fighting to control himself to appear unfazed. The most he had before was splitting a liberated bottle of wine with Storme and this was much worse. He thought he was doing a fantastic job of maintaining his composure.

“The room is 2 gold and let's call dinner tonight 1 gold. Breakfast will be 20 silver…but maybe you will want a double portion?” he asked obviously amused at Gareth’s prodigious appetite. Gareth reached into his purse and fingered the large gold there and placed it on the counter. The shiny coin glinted in the aether lights lining the walls and Broderick’s eyes furrowed at the sight of it.

“If I was a betting man I would say that is a dungeon coin.” Gareth's stomach dropped and suddenly he was at risk of returning the pheasant pie and one-and-a-half burgers to Broderick. “Well, all coin is good at my inn.” He swiped the coin before it could draw attention from anyone else in the room. He soon returned Gareth’s change which Gareth put away without counting. “Don’t worry young man. Your coins may be a bit shiny but not unusual. Mages have tricks to make them so…brilliant. I have a thousand stories of stranger things coming through here.” That made Gareth relax. “You clean up and get some rest. My ale is quite strong. I would suggest avoiding Nina over there tonight.” He indicated the blonde waitress that had served him. “That is if you want to get a good night’s sleep.” Gareth blushed and unsteadily started walking to the stairs. He paused and returned to get the last half of a burger and went to his room. Broderick smirked at the young man.

It was a nice and simple room. The bed was ridiculously soft and it had a flush toilet! He had read about them and actually flushed it three times before actually using it. The shower took a few minutes to figure out as well. There were two nobs, one for hot and one for cold water. He did the hot shower first and then finished with the cold shower. After the shower, his stomach had made enough room for the rest of the burger so he finished it. He was laying naked on his bed ready to pass out when a knock came.

Gareth got to the door with a towel around his waist and found the waitress, Nina, there. She stumbled on her words seeing his muscular upper torso, “Sir I came to check on you and see if you needed any assistance with anything in your room.” Gareth thought for a second. Well if she came earlier she could have helped him with the shower controls. Too late now. “Will you need your clothes laundered?” she asked. No Gareth thought. He would have new clothes in the morning and his clothes were still fairly clean anyway. Seeing him not saying yes she tried again, “Are you interested in any pies, cakes, or torts to complete your meal?” Well if he hadn’t just eaten the rest of the burger he might have…

Gareth finally responded, “I think I am ok. I just need to stretch out on my bed and dry off a bit. I should probably do my limbering stretches before bed as well.” Gareth was talking mostly to himself and didn’t notice the smile creeping onto the young woman’s face. He missed that look turn to shock when he shut the door. Gareth was feeling the long day and had missed out on stretching. It wasn’t long after that he passed into a deep slumber on the very comfortable bed. The only thing that bothered Gareth was the pillows had a feint aroma of vanilla.