

about 34,200 words

The Prince

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Chapter 1

I grabbed my bow and quiver of arrows from the stable, and hurried to meet Konaten at the archery range. I tried to practice archery with my ten-year-old brother every day, but since my birthday the month before, when I turned fifteen, I spent most of my time studying. Though I liked learning about the wizards and the exciting battles of the past, I wished that I could use more of my time to do something, not just learn about what others did.

'Someday I want to get out of this boring palace' I

thought. 'Then I can be a part of something important. Maybe even meet the wizards themselves.' I tried to keep these hopes to myself, for whenever my father heard about them he told me that being the first-born prince of Lotenia was important enough.

"Hurry up!" Konaten appeared in the doorway of the stable, "We don't have much time. Are you ready yet?"

"I'm coming," I said. I followed Konaten out of the stable and across the muddy ground. The archery range stood in front of us. Four targets rested at different areas of the field.

I strapped my quiver to my back and began to string my bow, while Konaten went ahead and started.

His first arrow flew ten yards through the air and struck the edge of the short-distance target.

"Wow!" I said, "Good job!"

"Thanks."

I positioned myself beside Konaten, pulled back, and anchored my arrow to the corner of my lip. I knew that I could hit the first two targets as easy as I could sneak an extra bowl of chocolate pudding for Konaten. The third one might be a bit harder. The farthest target still remained

un-hit. Konaten watched me. If I missed, then he could tell everyone that he beat me in archery.

I made up my mind. My arrow whizzed past the first three targets... and missed the last one by about a foot.

"Yes!" Konaten said, "I beat you!"

"I guess you did," I congratulated him.

"It's because I always practice while you study history."

And then it struck me. My history test! Classes started early today!

"Sorry, Konaten," I yelled to him as I ran back towards the palace, "Can you put my things away in the stable? I have to go! History lessons started nearly a half-hour ago!"

#

I rushed through several hallways and brushed past people as I made my way to the classroom.

As I walked, I caught sight of my father.

"Father!" I called, "How are you doing today?"

He turned and stared at me. He looked sterner than usual, and almost angry.

"Is there something wrong?" I asked.

"No. Everything's fine," he smiled, though quite oddly, "I'm just tired. I'm going to go lie down a bit. I'll see you later." He brushed past me and continued to walk away.

'Hmm. He must be very tired. Oh well, he'll be fine after he rests awhile.' I opened the door and went into my classroom.

My tutor, Tumbrin, sat in his chair at his desk, with the history book in his hands, waiting.

"I'm sorry!" I began, "I-," he cut me off before I could say more,

"I know you're sorry, but three days late in a row is not acceptable. If your father heard about this, he would not be very happy."

Father already acted unhappy enough.

"Is he going to hear about this?" I asked.

The harsh look on Tumbrin's face faded, and he smiled, and said,

"No, not this time. But don't expect to get off easy

again. And by the way, don't let your brother win too often, or he might be disappointed when he finds out that he can't really beat you. Now let us get going, while we still have an hour's time left. Quickly now!"

I thanked Tumbrin, as I fumbled for my pencil and promised to never be late again.

#

I strolled out of the classroom, excited to inform my father on the results of my history test. This was my first one-hundred percent test I had achieved all year, and I knew that my father would be excited to hear of it. Maybe it would cheer him up a bit. I had done well on other tests, but never that well. I knew the reason that I did so well- The test quizzed over my favorite subject. The wars of Twilland. I had always been interested in the wizards and battles of the past. Nowadays there was no war. No excitement. Just normal, boring life in a palace. Tumbrin always scolded me for this, saying that war was not

a good thing, and if I was ever a part of one I would agree with him.

Anyway, I began to search for my father. He had went to lie down in his room before my class, so I guessed that he was still there. I began to head in that direction.

I grabbed a couple of strawberries from the kitchen on the way, and knocked on the door.

After I waited quite a while, I opened the door, looked around, and to my surprise found no one. I thought for a moment about where else he could be.

Sometimes he took a walk at around this time. Maybe he was taking a walk in the garden. I decided to check.

Once again, I set off to find him. Upon arriving at the window (the one that looked off into the garden), I scanned it for a sign of my father. I saw no one. Where was he? I looked out the window again. Nobody in the orchard, or the garden. Wait a second- there! Under the bridge! I could faintly see two figures moving. But why would anyone be there? Who could they be? I forgot all about the search for my father, and hurried down the stairs and went out the back door that led to the garden.

I crept behind several trees and bushes until I made it to the bridge. Then I found a large bush that was close

by, and hid behind it. I peeked through. The same two figures stood there, their legs drenched in water from the creek. The taller one wore a long cloak.

The short one stood closest to me. I was so close that I could see the bright golden ring on his finger. Hmm. Strange. I listened to what these mysterious figures said-

"You have to get rid of your children! We need them dead!"

I recognized something about the taller one's voice-

"They will die at dinner time."

"Good. They better, or you will have Xagwen to answer to."

"I said they'll die, Kentruk, and that means they'll die."

"I hope so!" said the short one.

He walked out of the cover of the bridge and away into the garden.

These men worked for Xagwen? Tumbrin had taught me a lot about Xagwen, as he had all of the other wizards. But Xagwen was different. He was the traitor. The one who betrayed the other wizards and went off on his own. He ended up almost taking over all of Twilland, until somehow

he was conquered. Then the wizards banished him to Droken. Xagwen still remained banished there to this day.

I was just thinking that I needed to tell my father about this right away, when I watched shocked, as the taller figure threw back his hood. Father!

What? My father was plotting to kill children? His own children? Me and Konaten? This made no sense! Our father loved us. He was very strict, and sometimes harsh, but he would never hurt us! This couldn't be true! But it was.

Confused and shocked, I watched as my father passed by me and kept walking towards the palace.

Who was the short one, why had he ordered my father to kill Konaten and I, and why had Father accepted? I felt hot tears pour down my cheeks. At first I wiped them away, but then decided to let them come. I sat behind the bush and wept, as my father went into the palace through the back door.

#

When I awoke I did not know what time it was. I stretched and yawned. I took a quick look around- I was lying down behind a bush, near the bridge. What was I doing here? Then I remembered what happened. My own father had agreed to murder both me and Konaten. But maybe I only dreamed.

I stood up and stretched, and saw that the sky was beginning to grow dark. Dinner would start soon. Dinner was the time that Father had said we would die. I ambled across the garden and over to the back door.

Whether or not to open it I had not yet decided. Had my father truly agreed to kill me? If so, I was in danger every moment. Or was it just a terrible dream? I stood at the door for a long while, thinking. Eventually, I decided to go talk to Konaten. He needed to know about Father. His life was as much in danger as mine.

So I turned the smooth wooden handle and went in. The smell of freshly baked rye bread and hot potato soup drifted from the kitchen- My favorites. I started to turn away from the kitchen to go find Konaten.

"Rundelin! Why are you going that way? The food is over here."

My father!

"I was looking for Konaten," I said.

"He's already seated at the table. Come and eat."

I had no choice but to obey. I walked into the dining area. Everyone was seated in their designated positions at the huge table. Nobody had started eating yet. They waited for us. I went to my assigned seat, next to Konaten. He smiled at me. My father came and sat down in his seat at the end of the table, close to Konaten and I.

He leaned over the table, looked straight into my eyes, and whispered,

"It's your favorite dish. I'll get you some."

He poured me my soup and pulled out the bottom slice of bread. Then he looked at me again and grinned before eating his own food.

As I looked at the food in front of me, it came to me—The bread was poisoned! I already knew that in some way he was going to try to kill me at dinner time, and his sinister grin and making my favorite meal seemed to add to this assumption. If this was true, I needed to warn Konaten. But how?

Wishing that he knew the truth so he could somehow help me, I glanced at Tumbrin, who was seated across from me. Though I expected to gain nothing from this, I saw him

nodding his head as if telling me that we could eat the bread.

Was he in on this too? Or did he just not know? I stared at him again, trying to tell him that it was poisoned, but he just nodded his head more. My father still stared at me and Konaten. Konaten took a big bite of bread. I waited for him to plop dead.

I waited.

I waited longer.

Nothing happened.

He was alive!

And I was confused. Was I wrong? Was the bread not poisoned after all?

But after taking a bite myself, and nothing happening, I saw that my father was also confused. He had expected us to die from the bread as much as I had.

My father stood up from his seat and pushed it into the table.

Durmon, his chief advisor, stood up also, and asked what was the matter.

"I'm um... not hungry tonight. Please excuse me," he answered, and beckoned Durmon and the chef to follow him. They walked into the kitchen, and I knew what they were

saying. I was sure my father was asking the chef why the poison had not worked.

Soon Konaten finished eating, and he stood up and began walking out of the dining hall. I also stood up, and started to follow him, but something grabbed my arm. I spun around, and to my delight, saw that it was not my father, but Tumbrin.

"Hurry. Come into my study. I believe you know what I want to talk to you about."

I obeyed and followed him.

Once in the study, he beckoned me to sit, and he sat also.

"Now we can talk freely. Do you know why I brought you in here?"

"Well," I answered, "I'm pretty sure I do."

"Why?"

I hesitated a moment. What if he was actually on my father's side? He could just be here to find out what I knew.

Tumbrin seemed to sense my worrying, and reassured me,

"It's ok. You can trust me."

I still wasn't reassured.

He sighed, "I'm the one who saved your life. I swapped the bottle of poison for a bottle of colored water. Your food wasn't actually poisoned. That's why you're alive."

"How'd you know they would poison it?" I asked.

"I've suspected something for several days now. Your father, King Yentomere, has been acting strange, and talking to strange people. Yesterday I saw him talking with one of the doctors. I spied on them, and caught the doctor giving a bottle of poison to your father. This got me interested. I immediately swapped the bottle of poison for the water. Yesterday and today I have been trying to follow your father everywhere I could. Earlier today I heard him tell the cooks to put the poison into yours and Konaten's dishes. Luckily, I swapped the bottle of poison when I did."

"Why is my father doing this? Why does he want to murder us in the first place? Why is he helping Xagwen?"

"Xagwen? What do you mean helping Xagwen?" Tumbrin asked.

"Earlier I spied on my father talking to someone, and they talked about working for Xagwen."

"Who was this someone?" Tumbrin asked.

"I don't know."

"Describe him."

"He was short, and my father called him Kentruk. He wore a golden ring."

"That's him. That's the person I've seen talking to your father several times. He must be a servant of Xagwen. This is even worse than I thought. All I knew is that your father was for some reason trying to kill you two. But now I know why. Xagwen ordered him to. But why your father is working for Xagwen in the first place is what puzzles me most. Xagwen must have offered him something, though I don't know what more he could offer. Yentomere is already king!"

I decided to ask the question that had been plaguing my mind for the last five minutes,

"Is there going to be a war?"

"I hope not! A war would be disastrous."

"But do you think there will be one?"

My tutor pondered this for a moment and then answered.

"Maybe. If Xagwen has the courage to start making deals with the king of Lotenia, who knows what will come next. Xagwen has never tried anything since his outcast. Yet. If he does now, it could take the wizards completely

off guard. If there was a war right now, I don't know how we could win. The Elves have always been one of the most powerful countries in all of Twilland. And the most loyal to the wizards. If they joined Xagwen to fight the wizards, the wizards would have no time to prepare themselves. They would be defeated before the battle started. And if the wizards fall, all of Twilland will fall with them."

I shuddered at the thought. I knew that Tumbrin spoke the truth. Without them, there would be little hope for Twilland.

"Someone needs to warn them," Tumbrin continued, "Someone needs to tell them that Lotenia may no longer be their ally."

"Like who?" I asked.

"I don't know. But if I can't find anyone else, then I'll do it."

"And Konaten and I will go with you!" I volunteered, "I've wanted to do something like this all of my life! I need to get out of here anyway. It's not safe for Konaten and I."

"And you think it will be safe to take a three week journey to the Wizard Tower?"

"So you just want us to stay here and get murdered?" I

asked, beginning to get angry.

"No." Tumbrin said, still no anger in his voice, "I have a cousin who lives in Zeanon. He'll take both of you there, and you'll be safe."

"And bored," I added.

Tumbrin sighed, "I don't know. We'll talk about this in class tomorrow, when we have more time. For now, act like everything is normal. Don't let your father find out that you know."

"What if he tries to poison us again?" I asked.

"Don't worry. I'll make sure that he doesn't. You just try to stay away from him as much as possible."

I tried to keep being brave, but I couldn't help it. I started crying.

"Why does this have to happen?" I sobbed, "Why can't our lives just be peaceful?"

"Twillian doesn't make our lives easy. If they were easy, we'd never learn. And don't worry, all things work together for good for those who follow Twillian. He has a plan."

I forced myself to stop crying. Tumbrin was right.

"Remember everything I said," Tumbrin said, "I'll see you tomorrow."

Chapter 2

I hurried towards the classroom, ready to argue with Tumbrin on why I should go with him to the Wizard Tower. As I turned the corner, I collided with the one person I did not want to encounter. My father! I froze with fright.

"Hello, what are you rushing around for?"

"I'm heading towards my class," I answered, "I have to hurry, or I'll be late again."

"It's still twenty-five minutes until your class starts."

"Oh. Um... really? Well, it's better to be early than late, I guess. So... um... see you later."

"See you."

My father hurried around the bend, seeming in as much a hurry as I was.

I opened the familiar door and rushed inside, anxious to be with a friend and away from an enemy.

Tumbrin greeted me, and then we sat down in our usual places.

"Have you managed to try and keep away from your father?" he asked.

"Well, mostly... but we just ran into each other right outside the classroom."

"Do you think he knows of your plans to leave Lotenia?"

"No. I don't think so."

"Good," Tumbrin said as he stood up. He began searching through his ancient bookshelves.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"I'm just looking through these books to see if there is anything useful that might help us in our journey to the Wizard Tower, and..."

I didn't hear the rest, for my mind was fixed on what he had said, 'might help us in our journey'.

"Does this mean that Konaten and I are going to the Wizard Tower? And you're coming with us?"

"Yes."

"Thank you Tumbrin! Thank you!"

"Shhh. Quiet down. Yes, we're all going together, but we have a lot to get ready, if we plan to leave by tomorrow."

My cheering ceased, as I realized how much I would miss my home, "Tomorrow? Why so soon?"

"If we wait too long, someone will find out, some way or another, and then we won't be going anywhere. We have very limited time."

"I understand," I said.

"Anyway, you asked why I was looking through these books," Tumbrin continued, "The wizards themselves gave them to me, out of their library."

"You've met the wizards?" I asked in wonder.

"Yes, in fact, I used to be quite a good friend of theirs. I served as a captain in their army. When I turned forty, I retired, and came back here to live. I've been here for the last twenty-two... no twenty-three years now. I haven't seen the wizards since then."

"You've met Melepi, and Codairem, and Udrion?" I asked again, still amazed that he had not told me this before.

"Yes, though it's been even longer since I've seen Udrion, since he lives in Endeland. Now where was I? Oh yes! These books. I haven't opened a single one since the wizards gave them to me. Let me see. Math, philosophy, logic, politics..."

As he was looking through them, a small yellow note drifted to the floor, from the ceiling.

"What's that?" I asked, picking it up off the ground.

Tumbrin stopped looking at the books and took the note.

"It appears to have some type of sticky substance on the back. Strange. A sticky note. It has writing on it. It seems as if someone dropped it down to us. Let me read it," he read aloud,

*"If prince needs help, and has no mirth,
He must find the hole in the earth.
He'll find a friend around the bend,
Who every trouble he shall mend.
He'll lead prince to the great tower,
Then the enemies, they'll cower.*

D.V./R.T.R./T.M.P."

"All I know from reading that is that whoever wrote it is a terrible poet!" I said.

"It's not supposed to be a work of art. I think it's a hint, meant to help us."

"Help? With what?"

"With our journey, of course!"

"How?"

"By leading us to the Wizard Tower!"

"That is going to lead us to the Wizard Tower?"

"Look. It says that at 'the hole in the earth' there will be a friend, who will lead prince (That's you) to the 'great tower'. That has to mean the Wizard Tower."

"But we don't need help to get to the Wizard Tower. We know where it is, and with a map, a compass, and you, who have already been there before, we should get there easily!"

"It's not a matter of knowing how to get there. It's a matter of if we can get there. It will be hard, and we will have many obstacles to overcome. I think that the 'friend' in this riddle is supposed to help us fight through the obstacles, not show us which direction to go."

"That is, if we can find this 'friend'. Telling us to find 'the hole in the earth' doesn't help much."

"I agree; however, I think that we can find out what it means. Regrettably, we don't have the time at the moment. We need to prepare everything for tomorrow. We can't make any mistakes."

"We'll need plenty of supplies."

"Already taken care of. My cousin, Gushrog, has them

ready, along with three fine horses. They're being held in the forest for us."

"If that's already taken care of, then what do we need to prepare?"

"We need to organize the details of how we are going to escape. And you need to tell Konaten, and make sure he understands everything."

"Shouldn't we figure out our basic plan first?"

"I already have done that too. At noon tomorrow Gushrog is coming into the palace with his caravan. All we have to do is find him and hide somewhere within his caravan. So, as I said before, we just need to organize the details."

"Ok. Then let's get to organizing!" I said, excitement in my voice.

#

I awoke. It was morning. The morning that I would leave Lotenia and probably never see it again. I rose from my bed, and quickly put on some fresh clothing. I heard loud commotion coming from outside my room, and decided to

investigate, thinking that it was just children playing noisy games.

Upon opening my door, I found that this was not so. Men, women, children, and soldiers bustled about the palace corridors, all yelling over the chaos. People tripped over each other and squeezed past each other, all running about like madmen. Through this confusion, I managed to spot several doctors and nurses running through the crowd, all to the same place- Tumbrin's room!

I stopped staring at the disorder and plunged into it myself, becoming as intent as everyone else was to make it to my destination. I squeezed past what seemed like an endless amount of people, before I finally made it to the cause of all the confusion. Tumbrin was lying on a stretcher, several doctors crowded around him.

My mind raced. How? Why? Was he ok?

I asked,

"What happened? Is he all right?"

"Does he look all right, Rundelin?" Uwar, the head doctor, snapped, "He had a heart attack during the night. He's dying. So move away. Now!"

He pushed me back into the crowd, but I tried another doctor.

"Can you help him?"

The doctor looked offended and answered,

"Are you questioning my skill, young man? You ask if I can help him? I am a professional doctor, and of course I can help him."

I stared at him, and realized that he was not one of our doctors. He wore a doctor's suit, but on one eye he wore a golden monocle, and I could tell that he was not an Elf.

"Who are you? I asked, puzzled.

"Me? I am the most talented doctor in the country. More accurately, all of Twilland! You see, I came here to help, but these bumbling baboons won't let me. I promise you, if you give me a chance, your tutor will be better in no time."

"How did you know he was my tutor?" I asked, surprised that a stranger would know this.

"Oh. Well, he looked like a tutor-like chap, and since you are the one asking me to help him, I guessed he was your tutor! He won't be alive for long though, if those so-called doctors keep accomplishing how much they have so far."

Something about the doctor made me trust him.

"Follow me," I said, and I began heading towards Uwar and Tumbrin.

I rushed over to Uwar, again, and pleaded with him.

"No!" Uwar hollered, "We're not letting a stranger do anything. I think we'll manage fine with our own race doing the job."

"But..."

"But what? Listen to your elders, Rundelin! Tumbrin is going to die. There's no doubt..."

He was interrupted as one of the younger doctors called to him, "He's ok! He's waking up!"

This seemed to shock Uwar,

"Oh. What good news," He stammered, as he went back to the stretcher where Tumbrin laid.

I ran to Tumbrin's side, ignoring the harsh commands from the doctors to step back.

"Tumbrin!" I cried, "You're okay! I thought that you were going to die!"

Tumbrin moved his head to look at me,

"Rundelin! You..." he looked at all of the other people who were listening to him, "You must finish our... class project. Even if I die, you must finish without me."

I caught on immediately. The 'class project' was our

mission.

He continued, "You still must do it today and buy the supplies from the merchant that is travelling in today. It will be very hard, but I'm convinced that you can do it."

The doctors looked at each other, confused.

"All things are possible with Twillian," Tumbrin continued, "Remember that. Now promise me that you will finish it."

"But... Tumbrin..." I stammered, "You're going to be fine."

"Promise!" he said again.

"I promise, but the doctors said you were ok."

"I don't trust doctors," he said as he glared at Uwar, who was coming towards us.

"Glad to see you're doing better," Uwar said, "I'm just going to give you something to help with the pain. Here, drink this," he said, handing Tumbrin a full glass.

Tumbrin took it, but immediately dropped it onto the ground, and it shattered, spreading liquid all over the room.

"I'm sorry. I must still be a bit shaky."

"Oh, that's ok. I brought two, just in case," he said as his other hand revealed another glass, "I'll help you this time."

Uwar poured the liquid down Tumbrin's throat.

Tumbrin looked like he was choking, and tried to spit it out, but Uwar forced him to swallow.

Tumbrin began coughing violently.

"Don't worry," Uwar said as he walked away, "Soon the pain will be gone. That I promise you."

"Are you ok Tumbrin?" I asked, but he kept coughing.

Tumbrin's face began to turn purple, and I guessed he was getting worse.

"He needs help!" I yelled to the doctors, and they came back.

I glanced back at Tumbrin, who was now choking for breath, the doctors beginning to crowd around him. Uwar was there too, puzzled that Tumbrin had suddenly gotten worse, but doing nothing to help him recover.

In a flash the foreigner was there, and he attempted to make it to Tumbrin to try to help, but was only pushed back by Uwar.

"Let him help!" I screamed, "He might be able to save him."

"No!" Uwar shouted back, "We are not going to let him do anything!"

This sudden outburst shocked the other doctors, and one asked,

"But Uwar, why not? We could at least let him try."

"I said no!" he yelled back, "And I am in charge! Not you!"

Tumbrin kept coughing.

"You're not in charge of me, though," the foreigner said as he pushed through, "In fact I am in charge of you."

"You are not, you insane lunatic!" Uwar snapped.

"Oh yes I am. I am... Vuran, the greatest doctor in Twilland!" he exclaimed, "So that means that I am even greater than you, which means that I am in charge of you. See? I was right."

Tumbrin's coughing started to grow fainter.

"Get out of here this instant!" Uwar retorted, "Who let you into the palace, anyway?"

"The king himself!" Vuran said grandly.

"The king just left yesterday evening on a business trip."

"Oh. Well, I thought he was the king. Maybe it was the general."

"The general went with the king."

"The cook?" Vuran hoped.

Tumbrin's coughing ceased.

I stopped listening to the argument, and ran to him. The doctors listened for any sign of breathing.

"He's dead," one of them exclaimed.

Vuran lowered his head and walked past me, muttering under his breath,

"He was poisoned."

Poisoned! Why had I not thought of it before? Why else would he have a heart attack just before we were about to leave? Tumbrin's body must have overcame the first batch, which was why he woke up, but the second batch must have been stronger. And Uwar had done it! He must have also been the one who gave the bottle of poison to my father to try to kill Konaten and I! And who was this Vuran, who knew that Tumbrin had been poisoned?

But Tumbrin was dead now, and Uwar murdered him. But it was not just Uwar's fault, for I knew that my father himself had ordered the murder of my beloved tutor.

Chapter 3

"Merchant caravan!" The distant voice came from the palace's watchman, "Open the gates!"

Gushrog had arrived. It was time to leave Lotenia where to I had not yet decided. I would either fulfill my promise to Tumbrin and continue on with the mission, or I would escape to Zeanon, where Konaten and I would be safe. I slung my bag of supplies over my shoulder, and went to get Konaten.

"Konaten!" I called as I pushed through the orchard's apple trees, "Come on. Tumbrin's cousin is here. It's time to leave."

Konaten grabbed several apples, put them into his bag, and then came.

I had already explained everything to him, though I didn't know if he really understood. Konaten liked the security and comfort of the palace, and at first he complained about having to go on a "boring journey", but eventually he accepted it.

Soon we made it to the market. The smells of rotten fruits and exotic spices filled my nostrils. As usual, busy people hurried around the market, stopping now and

then to look at a merchant's wares. Soldiers guarded every street corner, and I knew it would be difficult to make it into the safety of Gushrog's caravan

"Now what?" Konaten asked.

"We have to wait for Gushrog."

"He's in the caravan, right?"

"Yes."

"Then let's go. It's right over there," Konaten said, pointing to the far end of the market.

A large line of carriages remained stopped in the center of the market, and people from all over began heading in that direction so they could make sure to have a chance to buy all of the rare goods that the foreign caravan was sure to carry.

We too started in that direction, blending in with the other people.

We hadn't gone far, when I spotted a familiar face—Vuran the doctor! He no longer wore his doctor's clothes, but still wore his monocle, and the clothes of a poor townsman.

"Vuran!" I shouted, but he kept walking, heedless to my call. "Vuran!" I shouted louder, but still he kept walking.

"Who's Vuran?" asked Konaten.

"He's the doctor I met earlier today. He's a stranger here. Vuran!" I shouted again.

I grabbed Konaten's hand and ran to catch up to the doctor.

"Vuran," I said, "You're still here!"

"Huh?" he asked, "Who are you?"

"Remember? Earlier today, you tried to help my tutor recover."

"What? I just got back into town an hour ago. Now if you'll excuse me, I'm busy shopping." He pushed me away and walked off.

"That's strange," I said, "I'm sure that was Vuran. Oh well, I guess I was mistaken," I said, and we continued towards the caravan.

It was close ahead, and I began to wonder where we would meet Gushrog, when we were pulled from the sidewalk and into a dark alleyway.

I looked into the face of our attacker, and saw a bearded face, similar to that of Tumbrin's.

"Gushrog!" I said.

"Yes. It's me. From the description Tumbrin gave me in his letter, I thought you were the ones. By the way, where is Tumbrin?"

"He's dead," I said bluntly.

"What?! Dead? How is he dead? He just sent me the letter three days ago!"

"He was poisoned. He died this morning."

Gushrog's gentle eyes turned angry, "Tumbrin said things were getting dangerous here, but I never expected he would be murdered!" His eyes became gentle again as he spoke to us, "Are you still going?"

"We're leaving, but I don't know where to," I answered. "I don't think we can travel the long journey to the Wizard Tower alone, but I promised Tumbrin I would do it."

"I think he would understand if you didn't," Gushrog said, "I can always take you to my home in Zeanon."

"I don't know... he made me promise..."

"It's your choice, but I just want you to know that my offer's there if you want it."

"That's very kind of you... but I'll have to think about it."

"Don't worry; you don't have to decide yet. First we need to focus on getting you out of the city. Come on, follow me."

We began to follow Gushrog, and pretty soon we made it to the caravan.

"Stay here," he said as he walked towards a large green-trimmed tent, "I'll be back in a second."

Konaten and I waited, but he did not come back in a second. After about fifteen minutes, Konaten began complaining.

"I'm hungry, Rundelin!"

"Eat some of the apples you picked from the orchard."

"I already have. I ate three. I'm tired of apples. Can't I have some of the dried apricots you packed for the journey?"

"No!" I said, "We need to save those."

"But I'm really hungry!"

"Can't you wait a little longer?" I asked.

"No!"

"Well, you have to. Gushrog said to wait here, and that's what we're going to do."

"If you're not coming, then I'll just go steal some food from the market."

"No!" I said.

After I thought more about it, I figured it wouldn't matter if we went and bought some food real quick. We'd be back before Gushrog even noticed that we were gone.

"I'm going too, Konaten," I said.

The bread and cheese seller was close by, so I hurried and bought Konaten a slice of each.

"There," I said, "Here's your food."

"Let's go back now," I began, but was shocked to see the second familiar face in the market in one day.

Uwar! And he was coming right towards us! I tried to get both of us out of sight, but Konaten wrenched away from me.

"Stop!" he said, "What are you doing?"

"We need to hide! Uwar's here. He's our enemy!" I said, but we were almost out of time. Uwar was getting closer.

"Hurry! Run!"

I jumped out of sight, and hid under an empty table that had a table cloth over it to cover me.

Konaten tried to come with me, but he tripped and fell down on the ground.

No! Uwar was here now, and he saw Konaten on the ground right away.

"Konaten! What are you doing alone in the market? I've been looking everywhere for you and Rundelin! I came here to find you both. I have to bring you back to the palace at once. Do you have any idea where Rundelin is?"

From under the table, I panicked. I couldn't just stay hidden and let him take Konaten back to the palace, but at the same time I couldn't try to stop him, or I would also be brought back. If only we had waited for Gushrog, as he had told us to do!

"Rundelin was here," Konaten answered Uwar, "But he just went back to the palace. I was just about to go back also."

"Good!" Uwar said, "Let's go find him there. You're father is waiting."

I watched them go from my hiding spot. This was terrible! Konaten was going back to the palace, and all of our plans of escape were done for. I had to do something!

I snuck out of my hiding spot. Konaten and Uwar continued walking onwards to the palace. I could see no

way to save Konaten, and just when I almost gave up hope, an idea came to me.

I reached into my pocket. Four gold coins, fifteen silver, and twelve bronze.

Not a lot, but maybe enough. Konaten and Uwar were still reasonably close to me. I yelled as loud as I possibly could,

“Freeeeeeee moneyyyyyy!!!”

I took aim, and launched the coins into the air. They landed around Uwar and Konaten.

Shoppers, beggars, and other people ran for the money, surrounding Uwar and Konaten. The whole market became crazy, as people ran from everywhere to gather up the few pieces of free money.

I weaved my way through the people as I searched for Konaten. I saw him on the ground, crawling away from Uwar, who attempted to get back Konaten, but with no success.

Konaten saw me. I hurried to him and grabbed his hand, as I pulled him out of the horde, leaving behind Doctor Uwar.

We were soon free of the mass of people.

“You’re safe now,” I said, panting for breath.

"So, Uwar's against us too?" Konaten asked.

"Yes," I said, as we started back to Gushrog's caravan, "He's the one who killed Tumbrin. I should have told you sooner."

We made it back to the caravan.

"I hope Gushrog isn't too worried," I said.

"Not too worried!" Gushrog said as he appeared behind us, "I was worried out of my mind! Where were you?"

"Sorry," I said. Briefly, I explained the recent events to Gushrog.

"It took a little longer than I'd expected to find you a hiding spot in my caravan, but you still shouldn't have left!"

"I know. We won't do it again."

"We better get moving," he said, "Do you know where you're going yet?"

I had forgotten all about my choice. Wizard tower or Gushrog's house in Zeanon?

I looked back at Gushrog, half hoping that he would choose for me. But no, he stared back at me and waited for me to decide. I thought of Tumbrin. He had asked me to promise to go on the mission, and I had promised. If I didn't do it, than no one would, possibly meaning the

destruction of Twilland. But then I looked at Konaten. He would never be able make a journey like that alone, and we now had no money, as the money that I had used as the distraction had been all of our money for the journey.

"We'll take your offer," I said to Gushrog, "We'll go to your house in Zeanon, as long as it's all right with you."

Gushrog's face lit up,

"Of course it's all right! It will be wonderful having you two around the place. I always get lonely, without children in my house. My children are grown up now."

Konaten yawned, "I'm tired."

"Good idea, Konaten," Gushrog said, "We need to get plenty of sleep before we leave tomorrow. My house isn't too far past the border of Zeanon, but it's still far. It will take us two and a half days, if we're fast. You can sleep in this carriage, here, next to mine," he said as pushed open the tent flap, "Hello Rindon, this is Rundelin and this is Konaten. They're the Elf princes that are going to be traveling with us."

Rindon was a thin old man, with no teeth.

"Why, hello, youngins! Nice to meet ya!"

"Nice to meet you too," I said, shaking his wrinkled hand.

"You don't mind if they sleep here for the night, do you?"

"Of course not," Rindon said, "There's plenty of room."

"Thank you, Rindon," Gushrog said, as he then turned to Konaten and I, "I'll see you two in the morning. We'll leave early, so be ready. Don't leave the carriage in the morning until I come and get you."

"We won't," Konaten and I said in unison.

#

In the morning, as I waited for Gushrog to arrive, I still wondered if I had made the correct decision. I had been awake all night thinking.

'Tumbrin is dead now', I thought. 'Konaten and I would have never been able to make the journey alone anyway!'

But still I felt that I was being both a liar and a

coward. After all, before Tumbrin died I had promised that I would take the journey.

'But Tumbrin would never want us to take the journey alone!' I argued with myself.

'And what about Konaten? He is far too young for such a journey anyway. He deserves to live his life in peace!'

Yet I knew that without the wizards being warned, soon nowhere would be safe. Twilland would turn into a wasteland ruled by Xagwen and his minions. I shuddered at the thought.

But I couldn't do it! It would be impossible! Then I remembered what Tumbrin had told me right before he died. 'All things are possible Twillian'.

The tent flap opened, and Gushrog entered the tent.

"Ready?" he asked.

"Um... yes," I said.

"Good. Are you ready, Konaten?"

Konaten kept snoring.

"Konaten!" I yelled.

He remained still.

"We have lots of food prepared for breakfast!"

Gushrog said.

Konaten jolted up from his 'sleep'.

"Food is always good! Where is it?"

Gushrog smiled, "It's right outside. Come on, let's go."

We followed him, but inside I still struggled with my decision.

"We have everything ready," he continued, "We have a small mare for the two of you. Hurry and eat, and then we'll be off."

Konaten hurried to the food, but I stayed where I was. I gathered up my courage and declared, "I'm not going with you. I'm going to the Wizard Tower!"

Chapter 4

"You're what?!" Gushrog asked.

"I'm going to the Wizard Tower. There's nothing you can do to stop me. I've thought more about it. Tumbrin wouldn't tell me to make a promise if he didn't want me to carry it out," I said.

"But... but... the journey will be too hard. You don't have to go."

"I know I don't. But I'm going to, and I'm leaving now."

"If Rundelin says we need to go, then we'll go!" Konaten said, stuffing a sausage in his mouth before coming to my side, "If he's going, then I am too."

"I guess that there's nothing I can do to stop you, if you both feel like you should go." Gushrog said, "I would come with you, but I have to get back to my wife, and care for the farm."

"You've done enough already. Our supplies for the journey are prepared, but can we still take that horse you had for us?" I asked.

"Of course."

"You're sure?"

"Positive. It's not mine anyway. I stole it from your father's stables. I hope he doesn't mind." Gushrog said, grinning.

I smiled back, "Let's get going. The sooner we start, the sooner we'll be finished."

"You need to stay hidden in our caravan until we make it out of Lotenhaven, just in case. We wouldn't want someone to recognize you. I have a good spot for you to hide."

Gushrog led us to a wooden cart, packed high with sacks and boxes.

The hiding spot was in the back of the cart, under several loose boards. The space between the loose boards and the bottom of the carriage was just enough so that it could fit two people of my and Konaten's size.

We stayed in our hiding spot, which proved terribly uncomfortable after an hour of lying in it without moving. Finally we felt the cart jolt, and we began our journey out of Lotenhaven. After what seemed like forever, we finally got to the edge of the city, and the carriage came to a stop.

From our hiding spot, I could hear some of what the people outside said-

"We need to search your caravan."

"Of course." Gushrog's voice.

"We are looking for two runaway children. Have you seen two young Elf boys?"

"Not that I can recall."

"Good. Men, let's get to work."

I lay completely still, and so did Konaten. We didn't dare to move.

After a long time, I finally heard the words,

"Pass on."

The cart began moving again, and once we got far enough away from the city, Gushrog knocked on our cart.

"You two can come out now."

Konaten and I pushed the wooden boards up, and climbed out. We followed Gushrog until we made it to the riverside.

"You're still sure that you want to do this?" Gushrog asked again.

"Yes. Our minds are made up."

Gushrog sighed, "It just doesn't seem right sending two children into the wild alone."

"We're not alone. We have Twillian to guide us."

"Yes, you're right. I know you have some food packed, but it won't last near the whole journey. Here's some money for when you need it." He held out a hand full of gold and silver pieces.

"You've done enough already..."

"No. Take the money. You will pass several cities on your way, and you can stock up on food and supplies whenever you need. This should be enough for your entire journey."

I took the money, "Thank you. I'm sure this will be very helpful... especially with Konaten here..."

"No problem. Do you know how to get to the Wizard Tower from here?"

"Yes, we'll follow Arhen River to its end, and then we'll use the map to guide us from there."

There was a pause.

Konaten broke the silence, "We better get going."

"You're right. Thank you for taking us this far, Gushrog."

"My pleasure. Have a good journey. And be careful!"

"We will." I leapt onto the horse and pulled Konaten up behind me. We waved to Gushrog as we rode into the forest, until we lost sight of him. I changed the pace to

a gallop, and Konaten and I rode for a long time in silence.

Then Konaten tapped me on the shoulder,

"Can I have something to eat?"

"Not now, we need to keep going for at least a couple more hours before we take a break."

"An apple?"

"No!!!"

"But I'm hungry!"

"You're always hungry!"

"I know. Father always used to say to eat when you're hungry."

"If we stop we might be caught by soldiers from the palace. They'll be looking for us."

That silenced him, and he didn't say a word for at least an hour.

When I thought that we rode long enough that we could take a break, I slowed the horse back to a trot, and then to a stop.

"Come on Konaten, time for a snack," I said. He pulled off my backpack and leapt off the horse with it.

"Hold on! Wait for me!" I hopped off the horse and joined him, while I took some of the dried apricots, carrots, and sausage for myself.

We enjoyed ourselves so much, that when I started to pack up the supplies again, the sky began to grow dark.

"We'd better go," I began, but to my surprise saw that Konaten no longer sat beside me.

"Konaten? Where'd you go?" I looked around me, but saw no sign of him. I yelled louder, "Konaten! Konaten!" I felt a hand on my shoulder, and whirled around.

"Konaten! Where were you? I..."

"Quiet! I heard noises and went to investigate. There are three of them."

"Three of what?" I asked.

"Elvish soldiers. They're headed in our direction."

"Let's go. Onto the horse, quick!" We hurried onto the horse, and shot straight ahead, following the river path.

"What are we going to do?" Konaten asked from behind me, "If they see us we're done for! We have to hide!"

"I know!" I whispered, blinded by the sharp wind that blew into my face. "I just don't know where!"

Soon we heard the enemy horses' gallops. They were

close behind. Very close! I needed to do something quick. I prodded the horse forwards, now even faster, and moved us closer to the right side of the path. Then I grabbed Konaten, and we leapt off of the moving horse.

We fell straight into a bush. Our horse kept running onwards on the path.

Soon the Elvish riders charged down the same path, in pursuit of the horse, leaving their prey safely behind in the forest.

"That was too close!" Konaten said, wiping the sweat from his forehead.

I agreed. Much too close. We needed to find an alternant route to the Wizard Tower, away from the dangerous path. I put my backpack back on, and stood up.

"Let's go," I said as I pulled Konaten to his feet. "We'll have to walk from now on. This time straight through the forest."

Konaten nodded, and we began on our way once more.

#

I held the map in my hands and attempted to use it to guide us through the forest. I thought I knew where we were, but I wasn't sure. I calculated that within the day we should reach the city of Nimberg. There we could stock up on food, and maybe even spend the night. We had spent our first night on the ground.

The icy wind began to get stronger, and it sliced into our faces like a knife.

"Can we rest until this wind dies down?" Konaten asked, "I'm freezing!"

"No, we need to keep going. We've only been walking for a few hours."

Konaten moaned, but kept walking.

"Here, take this," I said, taking off my jacket and giving it to him.

"Thanks." Konaten said, "By the way, you'd better keep a strong hold on the--"

The wind tore the map from my hands.

"No!!!" I screamed, "Get the map!"

The map flew into the sky and glided on the wind as it traveled deeper into the forest.

We both rushed full speed ahead, attempting to win back our most valuable possession.

"Where is it?" I yelled, "It has to be here!"

"I don't see it. You should have held on to it better," Konaten said.

"You wouldn't have held on to it any better!" I argued.

"Well, if you would have listened to me in the first place and rested until the wind died down, we wouldn't have lost it!"

Nothing to argue with there.

"Who cares, what matters is that it is gone, and we're lost. Lost in the middle of the forest with no map!"

#

I ran back to help Konaten, and handed him the last of the dried apricot. He desperately needed rest. We continued to walk through the forest, even though we didn't know which way to go. This was now our fourth day. We had spent the second night on the ground again, and the third we found a hollow tree. We never saw nor heard the Elvish

hunters again, though I almost wished they would find us so we could be free from the maze of trees.

We needed food, too. The only way the food lasted as long as it did was because we ate very little each day. Our canteens of water had been refilled once when we found a small creek, but they were almost empty again. I prayed to Twillian to lead us to a city, but so far nothing had happened.

Many times I thought of giving up, but for Konaten's sake, I could not. If only we would have went with Gushrog when we had the chance!

"Rundelin, not that I'm meaning to complain, but... I'm tired. I'm also thirsty. And hungry."

"I just gave you the last of our food. I'll get you some water, though."

I emptied the contents of my backpack. A now empty bag of apricots, two almost empty canteens of water, my knife, and a small yellow note. Small yellow note?

Then I remembered. The note that Tumbrin and I found in his classroom, the one that had fallen from the ceiling! I had forgotten that I took it with me. I read it again.

*If prince needs help, and has no mirth,
He must find the hole in the earth.
He'll find a friend around the bend,
Who every trouble he shall mend.
He'll lead prince to the great tower,
Then the enemies, they'll cower.*

D.V./R.T.R./T.M.P."

Maybe this could help us. Somehow. If only we could find the 'hole in the earth'!

"Rundelin, hurry up!" Konaten said.

"Sorry! Here you go," I said, "Don't drink it all now. Save some for later."

Konaten gulped down the water, heedless of my warnings, until it was empty.

"I said to save some of the water for later! We still might have a while before we find a stream."

"But I was thirsty, and still am!" He said.

"Well, you'll have to wait. You can have some of mine later." I put the empty canteen back into my backpack.

I looked at the note again. 'Hole in the earth.'
What could that possibly mean?

'Oh well', I thought, 'I guess I'll put it away for now.'

After I packed the backpack again, I slung it back over my shoulder, and we resumed walking.

We walked for what seemed like forever, and still we saw no sign of water, civilization, or the 'hole in the earth'.

After more walking, Konaten stopped.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"Shh," he replied. "I'm listening."

"Listening to what?" I started to ask, but then understood, for I heard it myself. I heard the sound of water!

"Let's go!" I said, as I broke into a run in the direction of the sound.

We ran through the trees, and then we saw the source of the sound.

A waterfall. A river poured over the side of a huge canyon!

"Let's go!" Konaten said as he ran to the fast-moving stream.

"Wait!" I said, "Be careful not to fall into the stream. If you do, you'll fall straight down the waterfall, and into the canyon."

"I won't," he answered, "I'll just reach my hands in."

When we both drank our fill of water, I got both canteens out and handed one to Konaten.

Konaten reached his arm out, and put the canteen straight into the water.

"No!" I yelled.

The canteen was pushed right out of his hands, and the river carried it to the edge of the canyon, where it fell down the waterfall.

"The river pushed it right out of my hands! I couldn't hold onto it," Konaten said, as tears formed in his eyes, "Now I have no water for the rest of the journey!"

"It's ok," I said, then hesitated before continuing, "You can share mine."

Konaten's face lit back up, "Thank you! But are you sure that one canteen will be enough water to last us until we find another stream?"

"Yes. I'm sure we can manage with one."

I held on tight to the remaining canteen and filled it with water. I knew that one canteen would most likely not be enough water. The next stream might be far away. If we ever found another stream.

I pulled the canteen out of the water, plugged it, and put it away.

"Do we have to start moving again right now?" Konaten asked, "I'm tired. Can't we rest a while?"

"I guess so," I answered, "We can rest for a little while."

We both laid down on the soft grass by the stream. I closed my eyes, and rested.

Chapter 5

I sat up and looked around me. It was dark, and Konaten lay beside me. We had fallen asleep!

"Konaten," I said as I shook him awake. "We've slept long enough. We have to get moving."

He opened his eyes and looked around him.

"But... it's night time..."

"I know, but we've been here for too long of a time. We need to move or we may be found, that is if anyone is still searching for us. This place is much too open. The forest will be safer."

"Can't we just sleep here until morning?"

"No. We have to get back into the forest. Then we can sleep."

"The forest is spooky at night," Konaten said.

"But it's also safer."

We got up and went back into the shelter of the trees.

Once we went in, I agreed with Konaten. It was indeed spooky. The crooked tree branches looked like they might reach out and grab us, and the hoots of owls and sounds of other animals made it worse.

"What's that?" Konaten asked, stopping suddenly.

"What's what?"

"I saw something move over there," he said, pointing to a clump of trees that looked identical to every other clump of trees.

"It's nothing to be afraid of," I said, "I'm sure It's only an animal. Lots of animals move around at night."

"Can you make sure?" Konaten asked as he moved behind me.

"Ok," I said, walking over to the dark cluster of trees, "I will prove it to you. There is nothing dangerous behind these--"

Something grabbed me. I struggled to get free, and was thrown to the ground.

"Rundelin?" Konaten said, "Where'd you go?"

I didn't have time to answer, for a shadow emerged from the trees. In its hands I could barely make out the shape of a dagger. I rolled away just in time to dodge the stab.

I came to my feet and ran back to where Konaten still stood, trembling. I grabbed his hand and ran, pulling him behind me.

"What's wrong?" he asked as we ran, "Where were you? Was I right? Is there something back there?"

"Yes. And it's trying to kill us. So run faster!"

I no longer saw the shadow, but we kept running, as we leapt over sticks and vines, and ducked under branches so we could escape. We ran out of the forest, and the canyon stood straight in front of us. I looked behind me- I still did not see the dark shadow.

"Now what?" Konaten asked.

"I don't know, but I'm sure we didn't lose it this easy."

Something black shot from the forest. It flew through the air and landed in front of us.

"Time for me to kill you," It said in an evil voice, "You're father's orders."

I pulled the dagger out of my belt just in time to block the strong downwards blow. My dagger was knocked from my hands, thrown into the depths of the canyon.

I grabbed a rock hurled it at the shadow's cloaked head, and we ran.

We ran very close to the edge of the canyon. I looked back and saw that the enemy still pursued us, and was getting closer.

"Run faster!" I tried to encourage Konaten, "It's gaining--"

Something wrapped around my ankles and tripped me. I fell. I hung with one hand to the edge of the canyon, a life-ending fall beneath me.

Konaten stopped running.

"Run!" I said, struggling to get my other hand onto the cliff edge so I could pull myself up.

Konaten hesitated for a moment, but then ran, towards the forest. The shadow grabbed something from his cloak and hurled it in Konaten's direction. From where I hung I saw the form of Konaten fall.

The shadow turned back to me. It's sword shined frightfully in the moonlight as it neared me. It was then that I noticed the bright golden ring glimmering on the finger of the assassin's gloved hand.

Bright golden ring! The same ring that I saw on the hand of the short man that I spied on in the garden talking to my father, the day that I found out of his betrayal.

The shadow-assassin was Xagwen's minion, the one called Kentruk!

"Kentruk!" I said aloud.

"You know me?" His cold voice put shivers down my spine, but I tried not to act afraid.

"Yes. You are Xagwen's minion, who convinced my father to become a traitor!"

Kentruk laughed, "No. I did nothing to your father. That was someone else's doing."

Kentruk stood but an inch away from where I hung, now by both hands.

Suddenly Kentruk choked. The point of an arrow protruded from his chest.

I didn't know who had shot him, but I used this opportunity to my advantage. I took one of my hands off of the cliff edge, grabbed Kentruk's ankle, and pulled him into the canyon.

He made no sound as he fell to the bottom.

"My, are you going to just hang there all day, old bean?"

I looked up. Vuran! Vuran the doctor! This was the third time I had seen him, and this time he wore a different costume than he wore the other two times. He now wore the clothes of a traveler. (A cloak, boots, etc.) He also no longer wore his monocle, but I could tell that this

was Vuran by his face and accent. The bow that had been used to shoot Kentruk was still in his left hand.

"This is what I call a cliffhanger, what, what?" Vuran reached down his hand and pulled me up.

The thing that had tripped me still wrapped around my ankles. I unwound it, and held it up to examine. It was a long piece of rope with two heavy, black balls at each end.

"Ha!" Vuran said, "I've seen these before. They are very useful to assassins, to trip their victims."

"One of those things tripped me too," Konaten said as he emerged from the darkness, holding up another 'tripper'.

"Glad to meet you," Vuran said, shaking Konaten's hand, "So, you're Rundelin's brother?"

"You remember me this time?" I asked, "Last time I saw you, you denied that you were Vuran," I said, thinking back to when I ran into him in the market.

"Hmm? Vuran?"

"Um... yes, that's your name," I said, puzzled.

"No," he said. "That's just the name I used."

"What are you talking about?"

"That's not my real name."

"What?"

"Are you deaf? I'll speak louder." This time he yelled, "That's not my name!"

"What do you mean that's not your name?" I said, even more confused.

"Well, you see," he continued, "I'm not actually a doctor at all. I just pretended to be a doctor so they would let me help your tutor. That didn't seem to help much, though. Those foolish vermin still didn't let me help. My real name is Regano."

"Oregano?" I asked, "Like the herb?"

"No, not oregano! Regano! Most people refer to me as Regano the Ranger, the Great Ranger Regano, or Sir Regano the Magnificent. Some just call me, The Talented One."

I rolled my eyes.

"So you're not even a doctor? You couldn't have actually helped Tumbrin at all?"

"No, I could have. I knew all about your father being a murdering traitor and all that, and I also knew that you and your tutor were planning an escape."

"What? How did you find that out? We were extremely careful not to let anyone know!"

"Well, the attic of your classroom had very thin boards... I could hear you quite well. Anyway, I also found

out that your tutor was going to be murdered, so that's when I decided to try to help him. You see, I have special medicine that could have healed him in a second."

"Then why didn't you just give the medicine to the doctors, and let them use it?"

"For one, they would have refused anyway, and two, that medicine is very special. It was made by the Giants. If the doctors would have used it, they would have seen how well it worked, and tried to copy the idea. Of course they wouldn't be able to copy it, because the main ingredient of the medicine only grows in the Giant's land. A war would most likely be started over the whole thing, and I assure you, the Giants wouldn't be very pleased with me if they knew that I helped to start it."

"I see. But why did you pretend that you didn't know who I was back in the market a couple days ago?"

"I didn't want you to know that I was following you."

"You were following us this whole way?"

"Righto."

"So you were following us this whole way, and you didn't help us at all? First we nearly got caught by Elvish soldiers, then we lost our map and ran out of food,

and almost out of water! Not to mention that you could have helped us with Kentruk long before you did!"

"Well," he answered, "You had to learn to do things on your own. I didn't want to do everything for you. Besides, I didn't want to help you until you got to the canyon. After all, my riddle did say that you would not find help until you got to the 'hole in the earth'. I am a man of my word."

"You wrote that riddle? And this canyon is the 'hole in the earth'?" I asked, amazed, as I took the riddle back out of our bag.

"Of course! I wrote the riddle and dropped it down to you while I was eavesdropping from the attic. You didn't figure that out yet? I say, you need to learn how to use that brain of yours!" He said, poking my head with his finger rather hard, "It's really quite obvious. Look here, at the bottom of the riddle, where the riddle is signed D.V./R.T.R./T.M.P. The D.V. stands for Doctor Vuran and the R.T.R. stands for Regano the Ranger."

"What does the T.M.P. stand for?"

"The Masterful Poet, of course."

"More like 'The Mad Poet'" I muttered.

"Are you insulting my masterful work of art? How dare you! If you're going to travel with me, than you have to learn to respect my authority... and my work! 'The Mad Poet'. Ha!"

"We're traveling with him?" Konaten asked.

"No, we most certainly are not!" I exclaimed, "We have an important journey to accomplish, and he is not coming with us."

"Oh yes I am! I did just save your lives, after all. I deserve some credit for that. Besides, you're lost, and you will never get to the Wizard Tower at all, unless I guide you! Did I mention that in some places I am called 'The Glorious Guide'?"

I couldn't find any way to argue with him. We were lost, and if he could help us, than we would be foolish not to except his offer.

"What will it be then?" he asked, "Remain lost in the middle of the forest without food, or travel with me, and get food, a guide, a guardian, and a poet all in one set?"

"I guess I have no choice but to take your offer."

"Splendid! I knew you'd come around, old chap! Let's stay here for the night and plan, and tomorrow we will set

out. Follow me back to the forest. It will be safer there, and we can build a fire."

We followed him a little ways into the forest.

"Now, I think I have something in here that will help us to start the fire."

He started pulling miscellaneous things out of his bag. He pulled out five arrows, spare strings (though he had no instrument of any kind), small labeled packets of something, paper money (They used that in the Giant's land for money, though I thought that it made no sense. It was like using wood for money!), and last he pulled out a small rod-like tool, that appeared to be made of some type of metal.

"Here we go!" he said, "My fire-making contraption! See, look, when you press down on this button, and at the same time turn this wheel, it produces fire. It's another invention of the Giants."

To my amazement, flames spurted out of it, and soon, once we gathered enough wood, we made a decent fire.

"Perfect!" Konaten said, "That'll cook the meat up nicely."

"Meat?" Regano asked, "We're not having meat."

"No meat?" I asked, my heart sinking, "We don't even have any food? That fire's no use at all if we don't have any food to cook on it!"

"The fire's not for cooking food." Regano said, "It's here to warm us up a bit. I do have food, though. It's in my pack."

Regano pulled several sacks out of his bag and opened them.

"Nuts and berries?" Konaten groaned.

"Precisely. Nothing like natural nuts and berries to fill up your belly, what, what?"

After a not so invigorating meal, with our stomachs still growling, we prepared to sleep.

"Goodnight old beans, see you in the morning. We've got a long journey to Reklawyk tomorrow."

"Reklawyk?" I asked, astonished, "We're going to the Wizard Tower, not Reklawyk!"

"I know, but we're stopping through Reklawyk on the way."

"But Reklawyk's not on the way!" I protested, "It's a completely different direction!"

"Oh, shut your mouth for a minute, will you? I have

friends there. They regard me as a hero, for I've helped them on numerous occasions. I'm sure they will help us. Besides, they need to be warned as much as anyone else about what is happening."

"Fine. We can pass through, but we can't stay there for more than a day or two."

"Good." Regano said, "We'll talk more about this in the morning. Let's get some sleep, before the sun comes up."

"Good idea. I think Konaten needs it," I motioned to Konaten's still form, asleep on the soft grass.

"I think we all do. I'm quite tired myself." He yawned and lied down.

Before I could even lie down myself, he began snoring.

'So much for sleeping!' I thought, but I was so tired that the snoring didn't bother me, and soon I too fell asleep.

In the morning the next part of our journey began. We ate a breakfast of nuts and berries, and then headed out to Kywal, the capital of Reklawyk.

We walked for most of the day, only taking short stops to rest. Whenever Konaten started complaining about being tired, Regano let him sit on his shoulders for a while. Eventually, Regano got tired of carrying him, and then Konaten walked again.

Eating was another matter. Regano's stock of nuts and berries depleted quickly, until they all were gone, and then we had nothing to eat.

"Isn't there something to eat?" Konaten asked.

"I don't think so," Regano answered, "We're jolly well out of rations."

"What about that bow you used to shoot Kentruk?" Konaten asked, "We could use it to hunt for food."

I had forgotten about the bow.

"Where is the bow?" I asked, not seeing it anywhere on Regano's person.

"Oh, the bow?" Regano pulled at the collar of his shirt, "I must have left it at the spot we camped at last night."

"You left it?!" I exclaimed, "How could you leave something like that? It looked like it was made of pure gold!"

"Oh well, it's just a bow. I'll get another one sometime. Oh, and if you're really hungry, you can always have some fresh fruits and vegetables," he said.

"Fresh fruits and vegetables?" I asked, "We have fresh fruits and vegetables?"

"Well," he answered, "I have these special packets." He pulled out several small, unlabeled packets, "They were invented by the Giants."

"Everything you have is invented by the Giants!" I said.

"I know. I make lots of trips to their land, Watac, and buy all sorts of inventions from them. The things I've shown you are only some of their simplest inventions. You should see their high-tech paper making machine."

"So what are those packets?" I asked.

"Oh, right. These are packets of seeds. Each seed grows to be a different fruit or vegetable."

"Unfortunately, we don't have the time to wait for seeds to grow!" I said, annoyed.

"Oh, no, no, you don't understand. These seeds grow within five seconds. All we need to do, is apply dirt, water, and sun, and they will automatically grow. It's quite simple, really. Look."

Regano tore open one of the sacks, and sprinkled several seeds onto the ground, all a distance away from one another. He then sprinkled a small amount of water from his canteen on each, and soon they each became a watermelon!

"Amazing!" Konaten said.

"How does it work?" I asked, astonished.

"I'm not quite sure. The Giants tried to explain it to me, but they used frightfully colossal terminology, and I still don't understand."

Regano reached into his back pocket, and started gradually pulling something out.

Konaten and I watched in wonder as he pulled out a five-foot long sword, with which he cut one of the watermelons into several slices.

"It's... another invention of the Giants." He explained.

He put it back away in his pocket, and pulled out his monocle. He put it on, while Konaten and I each grabbed for a slice of the watermelon, and took a huge bite.

Both of us spit it right back out.

"Yuck!" I screamed, "That stuff tastes terrible!"

Konaten was gagging on the ground, and I hurried to get a drink of water so the horrifying taste would go away.

Regano shook with laughter as he watched us.

"Ha! Ha!" he laughed, "You ate it! Ha! Ha!"

We both glared at him, as he continued laughing, until finally his laughter died down.

"What is that stuff?" I demanded.

"It's watermelon, just as I told you," he said, still trying to suppress a chuckle, "The Giants can make these. Ha, ha! But they can't make them taste good. So far they all taste the same- Like a mixture between salt, ash, and sulfur! Ha, ha, ha!" he again broke out laughing.

After that, neither Konaten nor I complained about being hungry. We just ate whenever we found berries, mushrooms, or some other source of food. Regano offered to plant some more seeds for us, but we refused his 'kind' offer.

The next six days went pretty much the same. Walking, resting, walking, eating, walking, talking, and then followed up by more walking.

On the end of the sixth day, we got to the Harodron Mountains of Reklawyk, and two days later we made it to the Kywal, the capital city.

Kywal was a smaller city than I had expected. Even more to my surprise, the people looked just like us! Once back at the palace Tumbrin had said something about Dwarves not being 'Dwarfs', but until now I had not understood his meaning. Dwarves were not short! All my life people had told me that they were short, but apparently those people had never really seen a Dwarf! The Dwarves of reality did not all have oversized beards, or houses built of metal and stone. Also, the Dwarves did not appear to be obsessed with treasure (Which was a huge rumor in Lotenia), but instead wore very modest apparel, and had massive gardens in their backyard. Many of them towered over six-feet tall!

Though Lotenia overwhelmed Kywal in size and population, the Dwarven capital was a much nicer city. Every house, though smaller and poorer-looking, stood farther apart from the one next to it, and had much more land with it. All around us small 'booths' sold varieties of things to passing citizens. We passed a hat seller, a clothing seller, an instrument seller, several food sellers

and a potholder seller before we stopped in front of a booth that was piled with fruits and vegetables.

"Now we can get something decent to eat," Regano said, "My poor stomach's getting angry. It's been growling at me for quite some time now."

He began to examine the vast amount of produce.

"What do you want?" Regano asked us, "You can pick anything you'd like. I absolutely love the tangerines here. They are outstanding!"

So that's what we got. Six tangerines- two for each of us.

"What do you want for these?" Regano asked the merchant.

"Hmm," he said, "What do you have to offer?"

"Well," he answered, "I have some spare arrows with me." He showed the merchant his five arrows.

The merchant looked them over, "These are good arrows. It's not a fair deal on your part to take only six tangerines for one of these arrows. Here, take these tomatoes," he said, and he handed us a bag of six tomatoes.

"I'll take one arrow for that. Deal?"

"Deal," Regano said.

"Here you go," Regano said as we walked away, and he gave us a tangerine each, "Start with that."

"Wasn't that a really bad deal for the merchant?" I asked as I peeled my tangerine.

"Oh no, it really wasn't. He wants to get rid of them. He grows so many, that he needs to, or they'll spoil. The Dwarves don't usually buy food from each other. They grow their own fruits and vegetables. They only sell food if they have too much, and most Dwarves don't buy it, since they grow their own food. So we were actually doing him a big favor by taking so much."

"Do the Dwarves always trade for everything, or do they sometimes use money?" I asked as I popped a tangerine wedge into my mouth.

"They always trade. Usually a Dwarf will specialize in a specific profession, and will trade the things he makes for everything else that he needs."

"I see," I said. I decided that I liked the Dwarves' way of doing things.

We were getting deeper into the city and were nearing a huge building that Regano told us was the capital building of Kywal.

"Regano!" someone shouted, "You're back!"

"Evar, you old scoundrel! Good to see you again!"

We followed Regano to where a young Dwarf sat behind a stand in the market.

"What are you doing here in the market?" Regano asked.

"I'm doing a little experiment," Evar answered, "You see, on one side of this table I have bigger, nicer-looking fruits, (Those are the ones made by the Giants that you gave me, Regano) and on the other side I have smaller ones, but they taste much better. I'm doing an experiment to find out which one the customers buy the most of. I tell every customer that the smaller ones are better, but they usually still pick the bigger ones. They always regret buying them though. The taste is... not quite appealing."

"That sounds like you," Regano said, "Always making experiments... and building contraptions."

"Speaking of contraptions," Evar said, "Did you bring me those supplies I asked for?"

"Oh yes, I almost forgot. Here you go." Regano handed Evar a clear bag full of pieces of metal, strings, and things that looked like junk.

"Thank you!" Evar said, "For that, I'll let you and your friends each pick out a free fruit from my table."

Remember, the smaller ones are better, unless you like the taste of sulfur, salt, and ash!"

After we had each picked out a fruit (Not one of the Giants' ones), we continued to head towards the capital building, accompanied by Evar. During our walk we learned that Evar was the youngest son of Odorf, prime minister of the Dwarves. His older brother, Ailar, was next in line to be prime minister.

Soon we made it to the doors of the capital building. Regano knocked a series of rhythmical patterns on the massive double doors, and we all stepped back. In a few seconds the doors began to open. Two Dwarves stepped out to greet us.

"Welcome Regano," One of them said, "Please enter."

"Cletus, where are your manners?" the other Dwarf said, as he shoved the first aside. Then he turned to us and smiled, "Your Wonderful Highness Regano, Great Bard--"

"Bard?" I asked, confused, "I thought you were a ranger."

"I am a ranger," He said.

"I thought you were a bard," the Dwarf said.

"Yes, Naimor, I am a bard, but I am also a ranger."

"Then where's your harp?" I asked.

"Right here," Regano said, pulling a full-sized harp out of his pocket, showing it to us, and then putting back away. "The Giants invented it. Onwards!" He suddenly cried, and we followed him inside the building.

The ceiling was very high, and many doors circled around the walls of the circular structure. We walked to the other side of the building and entered one of these doors, which led to a wide hallway. When we almost got to the end of the hallway another Dwarf ran over to us.

"Regano? Is that really you?"

Regano stepped forward.

"Good to see you again, Ailar, old pal."

"Yes, good to see you. My father, the prime minister will be very glad to see you. Also, I see you've brought my brother with you." Ailar said, motioning towards Evar.

"Yes, I came across him in the market."

"Well, good. He's only missed a few minutes of our council session."

Evar groaned.

"And who are your friends?" Ailar continued.

"I'm Rundelin, and this is my younger brother Konaten," I answered, "We're Elves from Lotenia."

"Nice to meet you," Ailar said as he shook both of our

hands, "Both of you can sit in on the council meeting too, since you're friends of Regano. Try not to interrupt though, if possible. And if you are called upon, make sure to call my father 'Prime Minister Odorf'. Never simply call him Odorf. For us, that would be considered an insult."

Konaten and I nodded.

Ailar opened the door. There was a wide open space in front of us. The prime minister sat on our right, and on our left was a large number of solitary tables with a chair at each one, some occupied, and all facing the prime minister.

"As you all know," The prime minister was saying, "The disorder in our lands has been getting much worse. There have been so many riots that it's getting hard to count them. Just yesterday we lost seven good Dwarves, who unsuccessfully tried to stop a group of armed Dwarves from rioting. Nothing we try seems to work."

"If you'd just listen to my ideas, the trouble would end!" a Dwarf yelled from the back of the room.

"Lord Hakelbak, I still don't think that force is the best way to solve this problem."

"You try everyone else's ideas, why not mine?"

"Because using force will only make it worse. It will be giving them an excuse to fight."

"Ha! So you say. The real reason you won't fight back is because you're a coward. Uneasiness has been in our lands for years, and you've never tried fighting. We need to show our people that we are strong! This rebellion will continue as long as we have a cowardly fool as our leader!"

"Hakelbak!" Regano said as he entered the council room, "Did I really just catch you insulting Prime Minister Odorf?"

Every head in the room turned to look at Regano. Hakelbak's face turned bright red.

"Um... no... Sir Regano, Oh Worshipful One, I'm sorry, I..."

Regano sighed, "How many times to I have to tell you that I am not worshipful? The only worshipful being in existence is Twillian."

"Oh... um... whatever you say Mighty Regano."

"Thank you. Now, back to how you so insolently insulted the prime minister. Do you want my support, or not?"

"Of course, Oh Great Ranger."

"Then grovel before Prime Minister Odorf's feet and beg for his mercy."

The red on Hakelbak's face turned to a different shade.

"What?! Why should I? I didn't do anything but say the truth! He is a cowardly fool! Why else would he refuse to even try my ideas?"

"If you want a truthful answer, then it's because your ideas smell of fish." A council member muttered.

"Really? I don't smell a thing," Evar said as he began sniffing the room. He shrugged.

The council glared at him and then resumed talking.

"Lord Ibonek," Lord Hakelbak began again, "I thought at least you'd be smart enough to agree with me. Regano does, you know."

"He does?" everyone other than Regano and Lord Hakelbak asked at once.

"I do?" Regano asked.

"Yes, you do!" Lord Hakelbak fumed, "You've always supported my region, and my ideas!"

"I have?" Regano asked again, innocently.

"Regano supports my region, not yours!" a female Dwarf yelled as she stood up.

"He does not, Lady Soal, you fool!" Lord Ibonek said, "Me and my region are clearly his favorite!"

"You must be joking!" Lady Soal screamed louder.

"Silence!" Regano yelled over the chaos, "All of you stop bickering or none of you will have my support!"

"Sorry, Great Regano," Lord Ibonek said, bowing before he found his seat.

"Yes," Lady Soal said, "Please forgive us. We just got carried away."

Lady Soal and Lord Ibonek sat back down.

"Thank you for coming, Regano." Prime Minister Odorf said, "We welcome you and your friends here. Ailar will show you to your seats."

Ailar brought Konaten and I to the back of the room, and then went to his own seat at the front with Evar and Regano.

"Now," Odorf continued, "can we please get on with the discussion?"

"Yes, we can," Lord Ibonek said as he stood up once again, "As soon as you get that evil, warlike, ugly, disruptive, boisterous, insane fool of a Dwarf out of here!" he said, pointing at Lord Hakelbak.

"Bravo, Lord Ibonek, bravo!" Evar said as he stood up also, clapping his hands with glee.

"Stop calling each other names," Regano said, "Or I'll support Lord Hakelbak's region!"

"Yes!" Lord Hakelback said victoriously.

"Never mind, I take that back. You're too... disruptive and violent."

"I am not disruptive and violent!!!" Lord Hakelbak screamed, as he took a glass paperweight from his desk and flung it against the wall, shattering it.

"I must not have had the meaning of those words right then," Evar muttered to himself.

The room became silent, and everyone sat back down.

"Now, let's allow Prime Minister Odorf to speak," Regano said.

"Thank you again, Regano," Odorf said, "Now that we've finally settled down, let's finish our discussion."

A knock came from the door of the council room.

"Yes? Who is it?" Odorf asked.

"I am Lord Hakelbak's servant," a muffled voice replied, "I bring a message for him."

"Come in," the prime minister said.

The door opened, and a thin servant dressed in rags stepped into the room.

Hakelbak stood up and took the letter from the servant, and then read it silently to himself.

"What does it say?" asked Lady Soal.

"My business is my business," Lord Hakelbak replied as he stuffed the letter into his pocket and motioned for the servant to leave.

Lord Hakelbak sat down, and the meeting continued. There were several more hours of bickering and yelling before finally Hakelbak got so angry that he stormed out of the room. Things went much smoother after that, and soon the council session ended.

Afterwards, we sat and talked with Odorf, Ailar, and Evar.

"So how did you like the council meeting?" Ailar asked.

"It was... very... um... interesting..." I answered.

"And nothing ever got accomplished!" Konaten added, "Lord Hack-a-back should be dispelled from office! How did he ever get to be made a lord of a region in the first place?"

Odorf smiled, "The position was passed down by relatives. And yes, his relatives were just as disruptive as he is."

"So why don't you dispel him from office, like Konaten said?" I asked.

"We've seriously been thinking it over," Odorf said, "The only problem is that he has lots of support. Dispelling him from office might mean even worse disorder than we already have. Anyway, let's stop wasting our time talking about Hakelbak, and talk about something more important. Regano tells me that you two are on a journey?"

"Yes," I said, "A very important journey."

"Well, you can tell us more about it in the morning. First, I think you and your brother need some sleep."

"Yes," Regano agreed, "Tomorrow morning we'll leave. At least we'll get one night here in soft beds before we head out again."

"Soft beds sound good right now," I said, yawning.

"I'll go too," Konaten said.

"Sounds good to me, old beans. I'll be up for a while longer, but I can show you chaps to your room."

Regano led us into a large room, which he said was the guest room.

"Ok, I'll leave you two here. I'll see you in the morning. Have a good sleep."

Regano closed the door, and I heard his footsteps walking steadily away. I laid down on the bed, and just as I began to fall asleep, I heard a scream from Konaten, and felt something hard thump against my head.

Chapter 7

I awoke to a throbbing head. Rain pattered on the roof of the moving carriage that I lied in. It was so dark that I could hardly see anything.

Where was I? And where was Konaten?

I groped around the dark carriage, and felt him behind me.

"Konaten," I whispered as I shook him, "Konaten."

He didn't move, and I soon realized he was unconscious. He must have been hit in the head as well, which explained the scream I heard just before I too was smacked unconscious.

I felt a sudden jolt as the wagon stopped. A moment later someone opened the cloth door and entered.

"Enjoying your ride?"

Lord Hakelbak! He had done this! Obviously he was more dangerous than Regano and the Dwarves thought.

"I asked you a question," He snarled, "And I want an answer! Are you enjoying your ride?"

"Maybe I would be, if I wasn't riding in the wagon of an insane, evil, traitorous fool!" I answered, but then

decided that this probably wasn't the best time for insults when he hit me hard across the jaw.

"If you aren't grateful for my generous gift of letting you ride in such a fine carriage, than you can walk! Both of you."

He motioned for two Dwarves to come, and they pulled us out of the wagon and threw us onto the hard wet rock.

Mountains surrounded us. I saw no sign of Kywal, or any city for that matter.

"Put these around their legs and arms," Lord Hakelbak said, producing a clump of thick chains.

"Yes Lord Hakelbak," one of the Dwarves said, and soon they were at work clamping the chains to our wrists and ankles.

"You'll pay for this!" I said through clenched teeth, "We are Elf princes, and when our father, Yentomere hears of this he will rescue us and hang you on the gallows!" I faked, though I knew Father was not coming to rescue us, but more likely searched for us with the intention of killing us.

"Ha, ha, ha! Your father and I are good friends. We're both servants of our master, Xagwen, the soon-to-be ruler of Twilland!"

My mind raced. 'He too worked for Xagwen? Things were worse than I thought. Not only were the Elves planning to betray the wizards, but also some of the Dwarves!'

"Remember that letter I received in the council-meeting yesterday?" Lord Hakelbak continued, "It was from Xagwen himself. In his letter he mentioned that he searched for two young Elf princes, and he said that if I found them to bring them to him!"

'We were being brought to Xagwen? Xagwen had been banished to the barren land of Droken years ago after his unsuccessful attempt to take over Twilland. Droken lied on the opposite side of Twilland, weeks away from Kywal, and even farther away from the Wizard Tower.'

"Why does Xagwen want us alive?" I asked, "If I'm not mistaken, the only reason he wants us at all is so we won't retake the thrown of Lotenia."

Hakelbak grinned, "Yes, that's most of it. But also, two young princes would serve as excellent ransom in case something fails in Xagwen's plans. But that doesn't matter. Do you know what reward he promised to the one who brought you two to him? Huh? Do you?"

"Um... no."

"He promised one fifth of Twilland! Ha, ha! One fifth of Twilland! Ha, ha, ha, haaaaa!"

"Sorry to ruin your uh... happy moment, but Twilland isn't his to give you," I said.

"Oh, it will be," Lord Hakelbak smirked, "Believe me, it will be! You don't know how vast an army the Great Lord Xagwen has at his command! His army combined with mine and Yentomere's is enough to take over fifty Twillands!"

"I don't think you know who you're dealing with!" I shouted, "You're challenging Twillian, Supreme Ruler of Everything, The Maker and Owner of Twilland!"

"If Twillian is so powerful, then why doesn't He come and fight us? Why? Because, if He does exist, which I doubt, He is a powerless coward!"

"If you want to know who the powerless cowards are, then I'll tell you! The powerless cowards are Xagwen and all who follow him!" I said, struggling to get free of the chains that now bound me.

"Call us powerless cowards if you want, but when we own Twilland.. or should I say Xagland.. and all our enemies are at our feet, begging for mercy, we will be the victors!"

Konaten moaned, "Rundelin, what happened? Where are we? My head hurts."

"Good. I see that your brother is now awake, so let's get moving. We have a lot of ground to cover. Servants!"

Two other servants hurried to Hakelbak. The servants carried a large throne by two poles, one on each side. They lowered the chair, and Hakelbak sat down while they carried him to a carriage twice as big and twice as fancy as the one we had been in.

All of the Dwarves left us, except for one Dwarf who pulled us forward by the chain, and one that carried a whip behind us, brandishing it in a threatening way if we began to slow down our pace or stumble. Luckily they put Konaten in front of me, which allowed me to hold him up if he started to fall.

We went on in this fashion for hours, and soon the sun began to creep over the edge of the mountain peaks.

'Soon it will be morning, and Regano will find that we are gone', I told myself, 'When he sees that we are gone, the Dwarves will no doubt send search parties looking for us.'

But two days came and went, and nobody came to save us. Our backs now stung from many whippings, and our legs ached more with every step. The bruises on our heads had started to go away, but they soon came back from the frequent beatings from Hakelbak and his cruel servants. Each day our one meal consisted of stale bread, water, and sometimes scraps of the Dwarves' food that they could not finish.

It was now midday, and Hakelbak came to see us for his daily inspection.

"They're looking good, chums!" Hakelbak said to his servants, "In perfect condition! Ha, ha, ha!" With that he gave me a kick, and I struggled to keep from stumbling.

"How are you enjoying are merciful hospitality?" Hakelbak asked, "It could be worse, you know. You could be chained and whipped every day... oh wait. You are!" With this he burst out laughing, "Really, it's good for you though. You were both much too spoiled from living in a palace all your lives."

A sudden, earsplitting roar filled the path and echoed through the mountains.

The group of Dwarves looked about, startled. Hakelbak stepped back.

"What was that?" he asked nervously.

Several Dwarvish warriors drew their weapons and notched arrows into their bows.

"Answer me, you fools!" Hakelbak shrieked, "What was that?"

"I d...don't know sir. I think that it sounded like a d...d...Daarekln. I've heard stories of them. Some of them live in these parts."

"A Daarekln!" Hakelbak roared, "Soldiers, prepare to fight for your lives! We face a Daarekln, a beast so ferocious it could defeat an army thrice this size!"

This short speech did not encourage Hakelbak's warriors much, and most of them began backing away or running the opposite direction that the sound had come from.

I was as afraid as they were, and I shuddered while I stood there, helpless with the chains engulfing my body.

"Get the children!" yelled Hakelbak, "They're our pay!"

Three Dwarves approached us and started hacking away at the chains on our ankles, so we could move faster.

When the chain split, I sprang into action. I ran wildly at one of the Dwarves and punched him in the jaw with my chained hands. The other two tried to seize me, but I tripped one and ran to Konaten.

"Run, Konaten!" I said, "We have to escape!"

Konaten and I ran, but the third Dwarf pursued us.

"Faster!" I cried, "This might be our only chance to escape! We have to make it!"

I silently thanked Twillian for providing us this way of escape, and kept running.

I heard a shriek behind me, and turned around. Konaten lay on the ground, an arrow in his leg. The Dwarf who shot it and several others were upon him in seconds. There was no way I could fight them all with no weapons and chained hands. But I had to try! Giving up my last chance of escape, I charged at the Dwarfs, intent on fighting them to the best of my ability.

I ran into an invisible wall, and was thrown to the ground. I watched in wonder as a seven-foot tall beast materialized in front of me. Its whole body was covered in bluish scales. Gigantic wings folded at the sides of its body, and in its huge hands it held a massive mace.

The Daarekln bellowed a ferocious roar and swung its eight-foot-long mace wildly in the air, above my head. I stared at the beast in terrified awe as it kept roaring while the Dwarves and Hakelbak ran in fear, taking Konaten with them.

Soon the Dwarves were far away as they ran over the hills. The Daarekln still stood a few feet away from me. It raised its mace in the air as I covered my eyes and waited to be killed.

"Hello. How do you do? My name's Hyminstle. What's yours?"

I opened one eye, and was surprised to see one of the Daarekln's hands extended in front of me; the other was scratching its massive back with the mace.

"You can talk?" I asked, amazed.

"Of course! I'm a Daarekln. All Daarekln can talk. Now go on, tell me your name and where you came from."

"I... I'm Rundelin, from Lotenia."

Hyminstle shook my chained hands and nearly crushed them, with a combination of his strength and hugeness,

"A pleasure to meet you. Here, let me help you with those," he said, as long claws extended from his hands, and he cut the chains off like they were nothing.

"So," he continued, "how ever did you manage to get yourself caught by the likes of that lunatic?"

"I was in Kywal with my friend, and Hakelbak captured us in the middle of the night."

"And what's an elf like you doing clear out here in Dwarf territory?"

"I was... headed on a... important quest."

"A quest to where?"

"To... somewhere important..."

"If you don't tell me where you want to go, I can't take you there."

"You would take me?"

"Well, of course! I didn't save you just to leave you here to die."

"That's very kind of you... sir... but those Dwarves still have my brother, and I'm not going to leave him there to die."

"Your brother? I'm sorry, my eyesight is quite poor. I didn't see any other hostages. We can go right now and save him, though."

"Yes! Thank you!"

So we set off to rescue Konaten. Hyminstle told me to stay hidden. He would turn invisible and go into their convoy, just as he had done before, and save Konaten.

The only problem was that there was no sign of them. We looked everywhere, but it seemed like Konaten and the Dwarves had just disappeared!

"Strange," Hyminstle pondered, "It's not like they can turn invisible, like I can. We should have found them by now. I suppose I'll just have to look from the sky. You stay here."

And with that, Hyminstle jumped up and started flying. Daarekln frightened me enough on the ground, but when they flew they were absolutely terrifying! Hyminstle's wings spread out twelve feet in diameter, as he zoomed over the mountains. Soon he disappeared into the air. (or turned invisible, I should say)

I didn't have to wait long before something enormous hit the ground beside me.

"Still no sign, I'm afraid," A voice said from beside me, "This is strange. I've never seen anything like it. Where could they be?"

"Um... Hyminstle. You're still invisible."

"Oh, am I?" Hyminstle appeared beside me, "Sorry about

that. Sometimes I forget to turn back."

"So what are we going to do?"

"We'll figure that out in a moment. First, you need to tell me about this 'quest' you're on, and why you're in Kywal, and who this friend is of yours."

I sighed, "Fine, I'll tell you. I think I can trust you. After all, you did save my life."

I told him everything. From the betrayal of my father, to my promise to Tumbrin, to our dangerous journey and our meeting with Regano the Ranger, and finally to how we ended up captured by Hakelbak and his ruthless horde of traitors.

"That's quite a story," Hyminstle said, sitting on the grass, after already breaking many tree stumps and logs when he tried to use them as chairs,

"One that couldn't be made up. And if what you say is true, then you're right about the importance of your mission. We need to warn the wizards. And we need to get there soon."

"I know, but not without Konaten," I said, determined.

"Yes. Don't worry, we won't leave your brother. Do you have any idea of which direction he might be headed?"

"Yes. He's being taken to Xagwen, in Droken."

"Droken? Hmm. Well, I guess we can head in that direction. Maybe we'll find him."

I sighed, "I hope so."

#

It was two hours later when we saw them. The horde of Dwarves were running, and fast. The horde looked much smaller than it had before, and several of them had injuries.

"We've found them!" Hyminstle said, "I can't believe it! Well, they have a surprise coming for them." With that he charged full speed ahead into the stampede of Dwarves, knocking down several of them. This of course caused mass chaos on the part of the Dwarves. I ran to where Hyminstle had a Dwarf pinned under his clawed foot. Hakelbak.

"Have mercy!" he screamed, "Please!"

"We will have mercy on you," Hyminstle said, "If you tell us where your other captive is."

Hakelbak's eyes grew wide, "It can talk!"

"Yes," I said, "he can talk. And he will tear your head from your shoulders if you don't answer our question. Where is my brother?"

"Oh... your brother. When we first saw that Daarekln," Hakelbak said with a frightened glance at Hyminstle, "We immediately ran to one of our tunnels."

"Tunnels?" I asked, "What tunnels?"

"Well, you see, we build underground tunnels all over Reklawyk, so when we meet a Daarekln we can escape. The Daarekln can't fit in these tunnels."

"So where is Konaten?"

"He... he..."

"He what?" I yelled.

"He's dead."

Dead? Konaten dead? After coming so far with me, and going through so much... dead?

"Are you sure? How?" Hyminstle asked.

"We were in the tunnel, and we were attacked."

"By what?" Hyminstle asked.

"I don't know! I think it was a wild animal of some sort. Whatever it was, it attacked us and many of us died. The Elf boy was one of the many casualties."

I fell to my knees. My little brother was dead. He was one of only things that kept me going as long as I did. With him dead, could I continue my journey? Was it possible? 'All things are possible with Twillian.' The words of my former tutor echoed through my head. Yes. I could continue the journey. As long as I had Twillian, I could do anything.

"No! Please!" Hakelbak screamed. Hyminstle's hand was wrapped around his throat, ready to kill him in a single motion.

"Stop!" I said as I came to my feet, "Don't kill him. We said that if he told us where Konaten was we would let him go. We have to fulfill our promise."

"But it's his fault that your brother is dead!" Hyminstle protested.

"Twillian is his judge. Let Him judge Hakelbak."

Hyminstle let go of Hakelbak, who immediately began running off in the direction that his Dwarves had gone, without looking back.

Hyminstle put a hand on my shoulder,

"I think we need to go to Kywal. Maybe this ranger-friend of yours is still there. He might come with us to the Wizard Tower."

"You're coming too?" I asked.

Hyminstle nodded, "If we start on our way to Kywal now, we should make it there by nightfall.

"Nightfall? It took me three days to get from Kywal to here, I don't think we can get there by nightfall."

"Not walking, we can't. That's why we're flying. Get on my back."

#

The flight lasted for several hours. Hyminstle flew very, very fast, which was surprising for his size and weight. At first I felt quite frightened, this being my first time so high up, and I thought I might fall. Soon though, I realized that I couldn't fall, unless I tried to, for Hyminstle flew smoothly through the air, and he allowed me to hold onto his neck so I would feel more secure.

When we arrived it was dark.

"I'm going to have to turn invisible with you on my back," Hyminstle said, "Otherwise we will be spotted by the

night watchmen, and though it would probably turn out all right, I'd rather not go through all of that."

"So are you just going to disappear?"

"No. To you it will seem like nothing has happened at all, for you too will be invisible. You see, my invisibility is not exactly what it seems. All I do is emit a screen of energy around me, and it makes me appear to be invisible. I can make this screen slightly bigger, to also make you invisible, though it takes a little more strength to do. It's rather complex, really."

"I see. So when are we going to turn invisible?" I asked.

"We already are. When we reach ground, you must step off my back and knock on the doors of the capital building. As soon as you get off of me you will become visible. I will stay invisible at first, so I don't attract unnecessary attention. Go inside and find the prime minister, and bring him back out. Then I will turn visible, for Prime Minister Odorf knows me well, and will let me in."

We began to spiral downwards, until we landed right in front of the capital building. The same two Dwarf guards stood at either side of the huge doors.

Following Hyminstle's instructions, I climbed off of him and began to approach the Dwarves.

"Is it just me, or did that person just appear out of nowhere?" one of them asked.

"Um... Naimor... what if it's a ghost?" said the one I recognized from before to be Cletus.

"I'm not a ghost," I said, "I'm the same Elf who was here a few days ago with Regano. I need to speak to Prime Minister Odorf."

"But how did you appear from nowhere like that?" Cletus asked.

"Um... it's... an invention of the Giants," I said, using Regano's explanation for everything.

"Oh, okay." Cletus said, "You may enter."

"Yes," agreed Naimor, "Regano tells us all about the Giants' inventions."

They led me to a room, which they said was Odorf's chambers.

"Just knock, and he will answer. I'm sure he's still awake. He's got a lot of work to do, and usually he's up almost all night."

"Good luck!" Cletus said.

"Yes, may Twillian help you along your way," Naimor said.

They left, and I knocked on the door.

I heard someone stir inside the room, and soon the door was opened by the prime minister.

"Rundelin?" Prime Minister Odorf said, "It's you! You and your brother disappeared several days ago," he looked around, "Where is your brother?"

"He's dead," I answered.

"Dead?! I am very sorry to hear that. What happened?"

"It's a long story. I'll tell you about it later. Is Regano here?"

"No, he left to search for you a couple days ago. He hasn't returned yet."

I sighed. I would have to continue my journey without Regano.

"I need you to come outside," I said, "Hyminstle the Daarekln is waiting there."

"Hyminstle? Well, there's some good news! I haven't seen him for decades!"

"I'll lead you to him." I said.

#

Later, after we'd told Odorf our story and we ineffectively tried to fix up the capital building as much as possible (Which Hyminstle had demolished upon entering), we talked about our next plans.

"I'm not surprised about Hakelbak," Odorf said, "We've been watching him for a long time, and now he's finally made a move. But if he thinks that he can partner with Xagwen and get something good out of it, he's wrong. He will serve Xagwen until he's no longer any use to him, and then he will be thrown out or killed."

"Well," Odorf continued, "It's a good thing that you met Hyminstle and not a more dangerous Daarekln! You see, in the mountains you were traveling in, there are many Daarekln. Most of the Daarekln that live around here are not near as friendly as Hyminstle."

"In fact, I'm not even from these parts," Hyminstle said, "I live in Endeland, the island of Centaurs and Satyrs, as a companion to the wizard Udrion."

My eyes grew wide,

"Companion to Udrion?"

"Yes. I am Udrion's friend, messenger, diplomat, and personal bodyguard. I was on my way to Kywal to meet the Prime Minister when you met me, Rundelin. It was Twillian's perfect timing that we even met at all."

"What are you going to do now?" Odorf asked.

"I'm going to finish the job that Twillian gave to me. Hyminstle and I will leave as soon as possible."

"Please stay for a day or two, though," Odorf said.

"Thank you, we will stay at least for the night," I said.

"Then we will talk some more in the morning.

Rundelin, you can sleep again in the guest room. Hopefully you won't be kidnapped this time. Hyminstle, if you don't mind, you can sleep in the stable."

"Yes, that will be fine. It's hard for me to move in here. The stable will be much better."

"Then goodnight, both of you."

Chapter 8

After a good night's sleep, and an excellent breakfast at the mess hall, I met Odorf and Hyminstle outside the capital building.

"So when are you leaving?" Odorf asked.

"We should leave tonight," I answered.

"Good idea," Hyminstle said, "We need to get to the Wizard Tower before its attacked. Otherwise it won't do much good for us to warn them."

"I was thinking," Odorf said, "that I should send someone from Kywal with you. That way we can assure the wizards that the Dwarves of Kywal are still their allies, even though Hakelbak's Dwarves are against them."

"Who?" I asked.

"Our chief diplomat, of course. He's the obvious choice. In fact, there he is right there!" He said, pointing to a tall Dwarf clad in a black overcoat and matching fedora. "Nossada! Come here!"

Nossada turned, and came.

"I'd like you to meet Rundelin, the Elf prince, and Hyminstle, the Daarekln."

Nossada bowed to each of us and shook our hands,
"Nice to meet you both."
"You will be going with them to the Wizard Tower,"
Odorf said.

"Oh, will I?" Nossada smiled, "Is this a diplomatic mission or an assassination mission?"

"It's a dangerous diplomatic mission." Odorf answered,
"The wizards could be attacked any time, and Rundelin has come all the way from Lotenia to warn them of this and the Elves' treachery. You are to tell the wizards that the Dwarves of Kywal are their allies and will come to their aid at their very word."

"I was hoping for something more assassination oriented, but I guess this will be okay," Nossada said,
"Maybe something unexpected will happen. It always does. That's why I'm always prepared." He opened his overcoat to reveal several daggers and a small crossbow with several bolts.

"Hopefully you won't need those," Odorf said.

Nossada shrugged, "Rundelin, do you have any weapons training?"

"Not much," I said, "I know a little archery."

"Any sword fighting skills?"

"None. My father always said that I would never need to use a sword, and that fencing was too dangerous anyway."

"Ha!" Nossada laughed, "It's dangerous not to know how to fight! Sword fighting teaches you safety! Come with me. We still have many hours before we leave. When I'm through with you, you'll be a master swordsman!"

#

The blow knocked me downwards, and I clutched my left leg in pain.

"Ha! Ha! Isn't this fun?" Nossada asked, doing a series of fancy spins with his wooden sword.

"Maybe for you," I said, "You aren't the one with bruises all over your legs!"

"Well, you wouldn't have bruises if you would just block my blows. It's simple. Move your sword to block wherever my sword strikes. Then, when you see an opening, attack me."

I picked back up my sword, stood up, and again readied myself to defend against his constant attacks.

"Three, two, one, start!"

He charged with lightning speed, and I blocked left, right, up, left, right, up, left, right, smack!!!

I fell down again, this time a terrible pain in my right leg.

"You ok?" Nossada asked.

"Yes... I think so. I'll be fine."

"Good. We can stop for now, if you'd like, but first, do you see yet how easily you should be able to block me? Every time I've been attacking in the same pattern. Left, right, up, left, right, up, left right... down. Every time I get you on the down."

How hadn't I caught onto the pattern sooner? That was the reason that he always hit my legs!

"However, a good swordsman will never use a pattern like that in a real fight," Nossada continued, "If they do, all their opponent has to do is figure it out to defeat them."

"I don't think I'll ever fight nearly as well as you!" I said.

"Me? I'm not near as good at fighting as I used to be. I'm getting too old. I'm almost fifty now."

"You used to fight even better than you do now?"

"Oh, yes. I fought in many battles when I was younger. Then I decided to give up being a soldier and become a diplomat-assassin."

"Father, I want to practice now!" I very young Dwarf said as he appeared behind us and came over to Nossada.

"You can practice later, Dorln."

"Why not now?" Dorln asked.

"We're leaving on a mission in a couple of hours. I don't have time."

"A mission? Can I go? Please, please, please!"

"Dorln, you're too young. When you turn nine next month I will let you come on more missions with me."

"But I helped you on your last mission! I was a great help! I killed three enemies!"

"Yes, but that was different. Last time aggressive negotiations were necessary. This is a peaceful mission."

"That's what they all say! You and I both know that it won't turn out peaceful. Something unexpected will happen."

"Yes, you're right. Still, you can't come this time."

"You better let me come!" Dorln screamed, "You mean, fat weasel, who smells of rotting eggs and looks like a headless camel!"

I held my breath, waiting for Nossada to reprimand his son.

"Good job, Dorln!" Nossada said, patting him on the back, "You're already learning your insults quite well! You'll make a fine diplomat some day!"

"Does this mean I can come?"

"Um... let me think... no."

"But I'm bored!"

"If you promise not to complain any more, I'll give you your birthday present early!"

"Ok!" Dorln said, now excited.

"One moment." Nossada went to the back side of the weapons training room, and dug out a black box.

"Here you go."

Dorln ripped it apart, to reveal a pair of black leather boots.

"He gave you boots?" I asked.

"They're not just boots. My father would never give me just boots."

Dorln felt all around the boot, inside the boot, and under the boot.

"I don't think there's anything special about those boots-" I began, but then to my surprise saw Dorln open a compartment at the bottom of one of the boots.

He pulled something out.

"A knife! These are awesome! They'll be great for assassination missions! Thank you, dad!"

"You're welcome, son. I knew you'd like them." Then he turned to me, "Do you want to practice any longer?"

"Um... no thank you. I'm tired."

"Then let's go outside and meet Hyminstle. We need to find out when we'll be leaving."

We left the fencing chamber, walked through several halls, and eventually made it to the doors. We exited the building, and Dorln followed us, wearing his new black boots.

"Did you have fun?" Hyminstle asked as he greeted us.

"It depends what you mean by fun. I had fun losing a hundred times trying to practice fighting Nossada... and then realizing that he was just using an easy pattern."

Nossada smiled.

"We'll leave soon," Hyminstle said, "We're going to wait until dark. Even though I can turn invisible, it will be best if I don't have to. It does take energy,

especially to turn all of you invisible, too. The sun is beginning to set, so it won't be long now."

"Have you ever ridden on a Daarekln before?" I asked Nossada.

"No, but it sounds fun, to be so far up in the sky. It would make a great sniping post."

The doors opened, and Evar, Ailar, and Odorf came out.

"We've come to bid you farewell," Odorf said. He shook all of our hands, "Hopefully I will see you all again. Here, Rundelin, take this," He handed me a sheathed sword and a belt, "Just in case you need it."

"Thank you," I said, putting on the belt.

"May Twillian help you fulfill your mission," Ailar said.

Evar came forward with a full sack,

"I brought you some snacks for your journey. There are tangerines, apples, bananas, mangoes, peaches and several canteens of water."

"Much thanks," Nossada said, taking the bag and pulling out an apple, which he took a big bite of.

"Rundelin and Nossada, get on my back," Hyminstle ordered.

Once we had finished our goodbyes, Hyminstle pushed off the ground, and our flight began.

"My, this is fun!" Nossada said, watching as the Dwarven city got smaller and smaller as we went higher.

We sat, talked, and ate the fruits Evar had given us for several hours.

Hyminstle mostly flew in silence, so I talked to Nossada for a while, until he wanted to sleep.

Soon Nossada fell asleep (He tied himself to Hyminstle so he wouldn't fall), and I was almost asleep too when I heard a sudden high-pitched voice from below me.

"Hey! A little help down here?"

I looked around me, but the only person I could see was Nossada, in front of me, and he still slept.

The voice came again.

"I've been riding like this for the whole way, and my arm's starting to get tired. Can someone pull me up?"

"Where are you?" I asked, confused.

"Down here, you fool!"

I held onto Hyminstle as I leaned over his back and looked below. Young Dorln was hanging onto Hyminstle's leg with one arm!

"Dorln!"

"Yes, it's me! Can you reach out your arm? Please?"

"How did you get there?"

"Just pull me up!" he screamed.

"Ok... I'll try."

I reached for Dorln's arm. Dorln grabbed it, and I pulled him up, behind me.

"Thank you."

Nossada opened his eyes, and looked behind him.

"Ah, Dorln. I knew you would find some way to come. You did marvelous!"

"You're not mad that Dorln could have died trying to hang on like that, and he disobeyed you?" I asked.

"Um... no. Not really."

"Hyminstle, did you hear that? He doesn't even care!"

No answer

"Hyminstle?"

Still no answer.

"Hyminstle!" I yelled.

"What? Yes? Sorry, I was asleep."

"You were what?!"

"I was asleep."

"But... but... you're the one who's flying!"

"I know. It's called multitasking. Sleep and fly at the same time! I do it quite a lot."

"Just when I thought Daarekln already possessed every ability possible!" I muttered to myself.

"So what did you want?" Hyminstle asked.

"I was just telling you that Nossada's son has been hanging onto your leg this whole trip."

"He's been what?!" Hyminstle, "This mission is too dangerous for him. He's an inexperienced child!"

"I'm a what?" Dorln asked.

"Oh, never mind! There's nothing we can do about it now. I suppose you'll just have to come with us. But once we get to the Wizard Tower, you will stay somewhere safe the whole time!"

"Whatever you say," Dorln grumbled.

Several hours later Hyminstle informed us that we were nearing Wizard-Tower-territory, and soon we'd be flying over the surrounding forests.

"So how did you fellows like the trip?" Hyminstle asked.

"Other than being scared to death when I saw Dorln hanging from your leg, I liked it," I said.

"It was nice and relaxing," Nossada said.

"I liked the part when I was hanging from your leg, Hyminstle," Dorln said, "The rest was too boring."

"Well, the trip's almost over," Hyminstle said, "Wizard Tower, here we come!"

Something shot upwards, just missing us.

"Was that what I thought it was?" Nossada asked.

"If you were thinking arrows, then yes. My guess is that it is Xagwen's army."

More arrows whizzed by, some barely missing us.

"I'll have to turn us invisible," Hyminstle said, "Let's let them try to shoot an unseen target!" The arrows stopped coming, and Nossada pulled his mini crossbow out of his overcoat, as well as several more pieces. He fastened them to the crossbow, forming a huge crossbow with a scope at the end.

"Regano gave me this scope. It goes up to one-hundred times distance. The Giants invented it."

"But I thought that the Giants were pacifists," I said, confused.

"They are. This isn't supposed to be a crossbow scope. It is supposed to be used to see long distances, for a watchmen to use, or a sailor. But I modified it, and now it works as a crossbow scope."

"I see."

Nossada loaded a bolt into his crossbow, and looked through the scope.

"Yep! There they are!" He said, whistling, "There is quite an army down there. Let's make it a bit smaller." He fired.

"Direct hit!" He said, loading another bolt and taking aim again. He fired several times, all of which he told us that he hit.

"Um... Hyminstle," Dorln said, "Did you invite a friend?"

"No. What do you mean by that?"

"Well, there's another Daarekln behind us..."

"What?!"

Nossada and I looked behind us and sure enough saw another Daarekln. A bigger Daarekln, with red scales and an enormous axe in its hands.

"Not good," Hyminstle said, speeding up.

"But we're invisible," I said, "It can't see us, can it?"

"It can."

"How?" I asked.

"Remember, how I told you that I'm not really turning invisible, I'm just making an aura around us that makes us seem invisible?"

"Yes."

"Well, a Daarekln's brain is strong enough that it cannot be tricked by this illusion. All Daarkeln can always see other Daarekln. But this Daarekln is not invisible, otherwise you three wouldn't be able to see it. And it's not being shot at by arrows. That means that this Daarekln is on Xagwen's side."

"Yes, and it's getting closer, so can we please do something about it?" Dorln asked.

"I'll try to shoot it," Nossada said.

"Aim for its neck," Hyminstle suggested, "That is a Daarekln's weakest spot... though it's still not weak. If the Daarekln reaches us we'll be defeated. There's no way I can fight it with all of you on my back."

Nossada loaded and aimed.

I watched the Daarekln as it continued to move closer... and disappeared!

"Where'd it go?" Nossada asked, looking out of his crossbow scope.

"It's invisible," I said, "Hyminstle, where is it?"

"Still behind us," he answered, craning his neck backwards, "But coming to the right side."

"I'll get it," Nossada said, looking back into his scope.

He fired, and a ferocious roar came from the right side, startlingly close to us.

"You got it's leg," Hyminstle said, "and it's angry. I'm going to have to do some pretty violent swerving. Hold on tight!"

Hyminstle darted downwards, and I would have fallen if Nossada wouldn't have grabbed me.

"Now to the right!" He said, and again I almost fell.

"You all here?" Hyminstle asked.

"Yes," Nossada answered.

"Barely," I said.

I looked behind me. Dorln was fastening something to his back with one arm, while the other hung onto Hyminstle.

"Dorln, what are you doing?" I asked, "You need to hold on tight!"

He glanced at me, "Operation skydiver underway."

"What are you talking about?" I began, but then to my shock, I watched as he let go and jumped straight off of Hyminstle's back!

"Dorln!" I screamed.

Nossada looked back.

"Where's Dorln!?"

"He just jumped off! He's going to die!"

Nossada leaned over the edge of Hyminstle's back, and looked down. I did the same.

Dorln was falling with his hands spread out far.

"He'll be fine," Nossada said, "He'll catch up to us later."

"Are you crazy?" I asked, but I didn't have time to say more, for Nossada grabbed me and jumped off Hyminstle, with me in his arms.

"You... are... crazy...!" I yelled as we fell, "We're... all... going... to die...!"

"We'll be fine," Is all Nossada said.

We neared the bottom. The trees were getting closer and closer.

Suddenly I heard a pop, and we started moving slower. I looked up, and saw a big blanket with strings tied to it emerged from Nossada's backpack.

"What's that?"

"A parachute. It'll make us slow down."

It did just that. We began falling slower and slower as we neared the end of our fall.

Soon we were moving very slow. We went in-between several trees, and then my feet touched the ground.

"We're alive! That parachute thing worked! Now that's something the Giants should have invented!"

"They did," Nossada said, folding the parachute and putting it back into his backpack.

"Oh. But why did you jump off?"

"If we hadn't jumped when we did, we would now be dead. The enemy Daarekln was about to attack."

"I hope Hyminstle's all right," I said as I looked up, but of course saw no Daarekln, since they both were invisible.

"So do I. Let's go find Dorln, and then we can proceed to the Wizard Tower by foot. Follow me. Dorln should be over here a ways. He jumped before we did."

We walked for a long time, without resting.

"I don't think he's over here," I said, out of breath.

"Hey, guys! I'm up here! Get me down!" Dorln yelled from a tree. His parachute was stuck, and he was hanging from it, right over our heads.

"I'll get him," Nossada said, taking a knife from his overcoat. He reached up and cut each rope one by one, until Dorln fell from the tree, in front of us.

"What did I tell you about jumping off of a moving Daarekln without asking?" Nossada asked Dorln.

Dorln scratched his head, "Um... nothing."

"Oh... right. Well, I'm going to now. Never jump off a moving Daarekln without asking!"

"Yes dad."

"Good boy. Now, let's get going. We have a lot of walking to do."

"Yes, you do," a strange voice said from behind us.

We turned around. A large group of armed soldiers stood there, weapons raised.

"You do have a lot of walking to do... to Lord Xagwen's camp."

"We're not going to Xagwen's camp," I said.

"Oh yes you are," The soldier said, smiling, "That is, if you value your lives!"

Chapter 9

"Do you value your lives?" Nossada asked, smiling.

The soldier stared back at him, "You better drop that crossbow and get your hands in the air, or your lives will end!"

"What do you want us for?" I asked, "We're not here to cause any trouble. We're just passing through."

"And I'm supposed to take your word for that? We spotted a Daarekln flying over our camp. We shoot at it until it turns invisible. Then, after several of our men getting shot (most likely by that same crossbow you're holding), we decide to send a Daarekln of our own. Moments later, we see all of you floating down towards the forest like a bunch of angels. Most likely, you are all enemy spies. I'm not a fool. I can think through things. I know you came from the Daarekln. Now all of you, hand over your weapons and put your hands in the air! You're being taken to Xagwen's camp. It's a two-hour walk, so I suggest we get going. Xagwen doesn't like to be kept waiting." "Release us," Dorln said.

"I'm sorry, my boy, but no. I'm afraid that since you

are with these spies, you are going to have to be treated as our enemy. You have to be taken to Xagwen also."

"Release us, now!" He said through gritted teeth.

"I already answered you. No!"

"You've had your chance," Dorln said, opening the hidden pockets on his boots and pulling out the knives in one quick motion.

The soldiers looked at each other and laughed.

Dorln charged straight for the enemy soldiers, did a flip through the air, and landed on the other side of the soldiers, behind them.

The soldiers' laughs stopped as two of them fell forwards, a cut through each of their necks.

"Kill them!" the head soldier yelled, but that was all he had time to say before Nossada's well-aimed arrow hit him straight in the head. The soldier, alive and talking only a second before, now lay dead on the ground.

The other enemies were quick to respond. I soon found myself fighting for my life, dodging sword blades and arrows. One of the them picked me as his target. My sword was unsheathed and ready, but I soon found that real fighting was much harder than practice.

I slashed my sword with several wild swings in an attempt to somehow strike my enemy, but they were all quite easily blocked. My opponent then charged me, and began to strike in swift attacks. I blocked right, up, left, right, up, left, right, up- As he swung at my left shoulder I ducked and swung upwards. I struck him straight in the chest. The smile on his face faded as he fell lifeless to the ground.

I didn't have time to celebrate my minor victory, for before I could even get up off the ground, I felt a shock of unbearable pain in my left leg. An arrow.

Nossada rushed to my side and blocked a downwards blow that would have killed me. I grabbed my leg. Blood flowed slowly out of the spot where the arrow still remained imbedded.

Nossada kept fighting with Dorln. Many soldiers lay dead already, and the last four soon joined their companions.

Nossada and Dorln knelt down beside me, after cleaning their blades in the grass.

"You'll be ok," Nossada said.

"I'll be ok?! There's an arrow in my leg!"

"I know, but it's not very deep. All I need to do is pull the arrow out, and it'll be fine."

"Pull the arrow out! You are not!" I yelled, but Nossada took it out with a swift pull.

I almost screamed with pain. Dorln took one of our canteens of water and poured it on my wound. Nossada wrapped a cloth around it to stop the bleeding.

"There," he said, "Do you think you can walk on it?"

"I'll try," I said.

I took many agonizing steps, and after what seemed like forever, I looked back. I had only gone a few feet. At this rate we would never make it to the Wizard Tower.

"You'll have to lean on me," Nossada said, "We need to move. It won't be long before the rest of the army finds out that the others aren't coming back."

Nossada helped me to stand, and I tried to walk as I leaned on him. We went much faster this way, but still not fast enough.

"You're not the only one who got injured," Dorln said to me as he walked beside us, "I think I'm starting to get a blister on my finger. That's the worst wound I've ever had. Maybe you should use leg guards until you get more used to fighting."

Nossada and I ignored him and kept walking.

"Do you think Hyminstle is alive?" I asked as I struggled to keep moving.

"There's a fifty-fifty chance. That other Daarekln looked stronger than him, but the other Daarekln was also wounded from when I shot it in the leg," Nossada said.

He paused, and then asked,

"Does Hyminstle know what to tell the wizards? Does he know the purpose of your mission?"

"Yes," I said. I had told him everything when he had saved me from Hakelbak, "He knows. Why do you ask?"

"Because that means even if we don't make it, if Hyminstle makes it, he can tell the wizards. At least the wizards will be warned."

I looked shocked at Nossada,

"You're not giving up, are you? We'll make it safely to the Wizard Tower."

"I know. Probably. But if we don't..."

"If it's Twillian's will that we make it, then we'll make it!" I said.

Nossada's eyes grew wide and he yelled,

"Look out!"

He pushed me to the ground just as a javelin hit where I had been standing.

Nossada's crossbow thudded as it hit the ground.

"Father!" Dorln yelled.

I stared at the crossbow that had been in the hands of the Dwarf diplomat a moment before. He saved my life.

A savage scream came from Dorln as he grabbed his father's crossbow in one hand and one of his knives in the other, charging at the enemy.

I tried to get up, but couldn't, because of my leg.

"Dorln!" I yelled.

Dorln kept fighting, screaming at the enemy warriors as he attacked them.

"Dorln!" I yelled again, "Run!"

Dorln looked at me, hesitated, and then turned and began running full speed away- in the direction of the Wizard Tower. He and several warriors who chased him disappeared in the forest. Two soldiers pulled me to my feet.

"You really thought you could escape?" One of them laughed, "No one escapes Xagwen."

#

They held me in a small tent inside of the main camp-Xagwen's camp.

Xagwen was not yet here, but when he arrived he would deal with me... and then my life would end. I hoped Dorln had gotten away, and was safe at the Wizard Tower. Maybe Hyminstle also made it.

The tent flap opened. I was surprised to see several Dwarves enter, followed by-

"Hakelbak!" I said aloud.

"Yes," He grinned, "It's me! Where is your Daarekln friend to save you now? Last time we met you had me at your mercy... this time I have you at mine. And trust me, I'm not nearly as merciful as you are."

"So, you still believe Xagwen's lies?" I asked.

"And you still believe Twillian's? You've failed your mission!" he said, "Twillian didn't help you. He sent you here, to die!"

"All things work together for good for those who follow Twillian," I said.

"Oh really? Your brother is dead, your Dwarf friend is dead, and soon so will you and all others who defy Xagwen. Try making good out of that!"

"You are wrong about one thing," I said.

"Oh really? What is that?" Hakelbak asked.

"I have not failed my mission. Hyminstle, the Daarekln knew of my mission, and so did Dorln the Dwarf child. They will have already told the wizards by now of your and Yentomere's betrayal. The wizards will be prepared to fight. They will not let the traitor Elves into the tower when they come."

"Yes, you're right. Your friends made it," Hakelbak said, "But still, you've failed. Yes, the wizards will know not to let the Elf army in when they arrive, but we now have a different plan. The gates will open without the wizards opening them. We have an army hidden in the Wizard Tower. They have gradually gotten inside. Some snuck in, and others disguised themselves as the wizards own warriors. They are very well hidden and will strike at the right time. Then they will open the gates for us."

Hakelbak smirked.

My own confident smile faded. If this was true, someone had to tell the wizards. And I was the only one who knew!

"You know that you are going to die, and no one will save you. However, Xagwen is willing to offer you a deal. If you admit that Twillian is powerless and that Xagwen is the true god, then he will let you live."

"Your 'deal' is worthless," I said, "You are right, I may die on this earth. But that doesn't matter. All that matters is eternal life, life with Twillian."

"I'm guessing that's a no."

"You guess correctly."

Hakelbak smiled, "Good. Believe me, it was not I who wanted to give you a chance to live. It was Xagwen's idea. I am much happier knowing that you will die."

"And now I have to go," Hakelbak continued, "I have to prepare my troops to invade the Wizard Tower. By nightfall tomorrow, it will be ours, and the wizards will be slain! You may live until then, so you can see it fall. You won't want to miss it! It will be the most spectacular show you'll ever see. Ha, ha, ha! And the last!"

Hakelbak and his Dwarves exited the tent.

I needed to get out of here and get to the Wizard Tower. But how? I was in a heavily guarded tent, which was in a heavily guarded camp. But I would try, nonetheless. I looked around the tent, and caught sight of a small hole in the tent's fabric, right by the entrance. I peeked through it. Only two soldiers stood outside, guarding my tent. Hmm. Less than I'd expected. But could I fight them both without weapons? No. However, I would fight them... with the only weapon I had.

'Twillian, please help me!' I prayed, and then I walked over to the tent flap and said,

"Excuse me, guards, may I ask you something?"

"Huh? What do you want?" One of them asked, opening the tent flap.

"Do you know Twillian?" I asked.

"Twillian?" said the other, "Twillian doesn't exist."

"Actually, he does," I said, smiling.

"How do you know?" asked the second guard.

"Look around you. If Twillian doesn't exist, than who made all of these forests? Who made Twilland?"

"Um... well... I guess you're right. Twillian made Twilland." He said.

"But even if Twillian does exist," said the first, "He has no power. He can't stop Xagwen from taking over Twilland."

"The word of Twillian is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword," I said. "Twillian is even more powerful than Xagwen and his army."

In that instant something hit the ground a few yards away from us, causing a huge explosion and frying several soldiers.

Many more green and yellow objects fell from the sky and hit other places around the camp, all blowing up and causing mass death and confusion.

The two soldiers who I had been talking to looked about themselves in shocked terror and then ran.

"We're under attack!" people yelled, "Get under cover! Retreat!"

Many more explosions erupted. The enemy army scattered. Many were dead or wounded, and the majority of the others fled in panic to the forest. Many tents now blazed with fire.

'Thank you Twillian!'

I started to limp out of the camp, though I couldn't go fast with my leg still injured. The explosions had now

stopped. On the way I caught sight of half a zucchini laying next to a dead soldier. I spotted many other parts of zucchini and also fragments of squashes scattered across the camp.

Strange. The only person I could think of who would think of using zucchini and squash for bombs was... Regano! Was he here? I decided to find out. I grabbed part of one of the zucchini fragments and put it into my mouth.

Yuck! Sulfur, salt and ash! I spit it out and threw it onto the ground. Yep. This was Regano's work. Where was he?

"You there!" someone yelled.

Three Dwarf soldiers came striding to me from across the now nearly desolate camp.

"Is that the one Hakelbak told us to get?" one of them asked.

"Aye. That's him. He's the only Elf in our camp."

I turned and ran. The three soldiers followed me. For the second time in the last couple of days I ran into an invisible wall.

"Hyminstle!" I whispered, "You're here!"

"Of course," he said as he turned un-invisible, "We couldn't leave you."

The three enemies began to run away from us, but were knocked to the ground by an unseen force. They stayed motionless on the ground.

A man wearing a blue cloak came from behind one of tents.

"That's the wizard Melepi," Hyminstle said, "He helped us to rescue you."

Melepi!

"What do you think of our plan?" the familiar voice of Regano said from behind me.

I turned around, and there he was.

"You're here!"

"Why, of course, old bean. I couldn't miss out on all the fun."

"Did Dorln make it to the Wizard Tower?" I asked.

"You mean that argumentative bratty little Dwarf child with the amazingly horrendous temper? Yes, he arrived earlier today. He's there right now, with Konaten."

"Who?" I asked.

"Konaten. You know, you're brother."

"But he's dead!"

"No he's not," Regano said.

"Yes he is."

"No. Really, he's not." Regano argued.

"He is!"

"Do you want him to be dead?"

"No, but when he was with Hakelbak in the tunnel he was attacked by a wild animal and--"

"My, I wouldn't call myself a wild animal! Maybe sometimes I act a bit crazy, but wild animal?"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"It wasn't a wild animal that took Konaten. It was me, though I understand how there could be confusion on the part of the Dwarves. It was rather dark in there, and I was moving quickly."

"It was you?"

"Yes. After several days of searching and tracking, I finally found Hakelbak's secret tunnel. I was already there when his army arrived."

"How did you do that?" I asked.

"Well, I used this drill thing, that... the Giants had given me. As soon as his caravan arrived, I attacked, and grabbed Konaten as soon as I had the chance. I looked for you, but Konaten said you were killed by a Daarekln. I brought him to the Wizard Tower (Just in time, for soon after I arrived the enemy blockade closed in). When

Hyminstle flew to us at the Wizard Tower, he told us everything that happened, and that you were alive. That's when we decided to rescue you."

So Konaten was alive! Thanks be to Twillian!

"We need to get going," Melepi said.

"Melepi is right. We can tell stories later, but right now we need to get back to the Wizard Tower, where we will be safe," Hyminstle said, "This is only one of the many, many, camps that Xagwen has here."

Then I remembered. I needed to tell them about Xagwen's new plan.

"I have to tell you something," I said to Melepi.

"Oh, don't worry," Hyminstle said, "I already told them about the Elves, and your father's betrayal. We won't be letting them in, when they arrive."

"That's not what I was going to say. Xagwen has a new plan."

This got Melepi's attention,

"A new plan? Tell me, what is it?"

"He has his men positioned in your tower. They are going to open the gates for him and his army."

"What? They'd never succeed. I have too many soldiers guarding."

"No, you don't understand. He has more than a few spies. He has an army. They are hidden somewhere within your tower."

"Hmm," he said, "This could be bad. We'll have to investigate it as soon as we get back to the tower. For now, let's just get there. Konaten, Dorln, and Codairem are waiting for us."

"Wait, I have one more question," I said, "How did all of you invent those explosive vegetables, and how did your plan work?"

Melepi laughed, "We'll tell you about it later. Let's go."

We left the now-deserted camp, and flew to the Wizard Tower.

Chapter 10

"Rundelin!" Konaten called as we landed on the top of the tower and hopped off of Hyminstle, "You're back!" he ran to me and hugged me, and I hugged him back.

"I thought you were dead!" I said.

"I thought you were dead," he replied.

I also met Codairem, the other wizard who lived in the tower. Udrion, the third wizard, lived on the island Endeland, where he stayed until needed by Codairem and Melepi.

We spent hours telling each other all of our stories- I told about our whole journey, from Lotenia to the Wizard Tower. Regano, Melepi, and Hyminstle told about how they saved me from the enemy camp. I listened intently as they told of their strange ideas. Regano invented the 'explosive veggies' as he called them, though how he did it I never found out. Hyminstle flew invisible over the camp as he dropped the bombs. He said it was a good thing that I had come outside, for otherwise he wouldn't have known where I was, and might have unintentionally blown me up. Melepi went (also invisible) around the camp and got rid of all of the Dwarves who were still there. Regano served as

a distraction, for Hakelbak and most of the Dwarves chased him far away from the camp, until he 'disappeared' and left the Dwarves lost in the forest. That was how 'operation veggie bomb' had been developed and put into action.

After our reunion and story time, a funeral was held for Nossada.

Though I'd known him for only a day, it seemed as if I knew him all of my life. He had been a true friend and a follower of Twillian, and I knew that someday we would meet again, although not on this earth.

I tried to comfort Dorln, who acted a lot different after the death of his father, but nothing would soothe him. Hours after the funeral was over, Dorln finally began to act more of himself, and he helped us to prepare for the inevitable coming battle.

Melepi and Codaiem gathered all of us together at the top of the Wizard Tower, the only place that Hyminstle could fit.

"As you all know, we need to start preparing for the battle," Codiarem said.

"Rundelin, earlier you told me something about enemies in our tower?" Melepi asked.

"Yes," I said.

"And they are waiting for the right moment to strike?"

I nodded.

"Did Hakelbak mention anything that might help us to know when this attack might take place?"

I thought. He had said it would be the most spectacular show I'd ever see and that the tower would surely fall... but did he say anything about when?

I couldn't think of anything, "I don't think so. He said he would take over the tower and kill everyone inside, but I can't remember anything that he said about when they would attack."

"Are you sure?" Codiarem asked, "Did he say when the tower would be taken over? Think."

Then I remembered.

"Yes!" I exclaimed, "He said that 'By nightfall tomorrow, it would be theirs'."

"Well done, Rundelin!" Regano clapped.

"Yes, this is very useful information. Now all we need to do is find the hidden enemies," Melepi said.

"Yes," Codaiarem agreed, "That's the hard part. Once we know where they are, than our problem will be solved. All we'll need to do is toss a few veggie bombs into their hiding spot, and that'll be the end of them."

"But where?" Melepi asked, "You and I helped to build this tower. There is nowhere they could be! Our soldiers patrol every inch of this tower daily."

"Yes," Codaiem nodded, "The only place that isn't guarded is..." Codaiem's face turned red, "They better not be there!"

"Where?" I asked.

"The only place that is not guarded by our soldiers and that I do not permit them to patrol. It's the only possible place!"

"The library!" Melepi exclaimed.

"Precisely," Codaiem said.

"You never let anyone except for me enter your library."

"That's because I don't want anyone else touching my books! Many of them are almost as old as we are. We also have letters and journals from countless people. We even own the original map of Twilland."

"But how did you not see the enemies?" Melepi asked, "You read and study in the library every day!"

"Not lately," Codaiem said, "Recently, I have been studying 'The Art of Dwarvish Diplomacy', and 'Mathematics and Logic for the Brilliant Genius'. I keep both books in

my personal chamber. I'm almost finished with them now. I was just getting ready to return the math book to the shelves and pick out a different book, because it was far too easy."

"Far too easy?!" Melepi said, "That is the hardest study of mathematics in all of Twilland!"

"Then somebody needs to write a new book. I'm starting to get bored."

"How about you write it?" Melepi suggested, "You're the best mathematician in the world."

"I've already written dozens of books. I enjoy reading other people's opinions on things. But anyway, as I was saying, I haven't been in the library for four days now. The hidden army could very well be in my library. They probably are in the closet, where we keep the maps, letters, and oldest manuscripts."

"So now we can just toss some veggie bombs into the library, and get rid of them!" Regano said.

"You are not!" Codairem cried, "There are very special things in that closet! We are not going to blow them up!"

"We could try to fight them," Hyminstle suggested.

"My books!" Codairem protested again.

"So what are we going to do?" I asked.

Nobody spoke.

"I think we are going to have to go with the veggie bombs, old bean," Regano said.

"No." Melepi said, "Codairem's right. Those items are very precious. We can't destroy them."

"So we're just going to sit here and do nothing?" Dorln asked.

"No. I have an idea," Melepi stood up from his seat, "I can teleport them out of the Wizard Tower."

"You can do what?" I asked, confused.

"Teleport them. It'll be difficult, but I think I can manage."

"Are you sure?" Codairem asked.

"Yes. I'll do my best. Codairem, Regano, and Rundelin come down to the library with me. Hyminstle, you stay with the children."

"I'm not a child!" Dorln said, his face turning red. "You better let me go with you, or I'll chop off your head and feed your brain to the cockroaches, you puny wizard!"

Melepi smiled, "Threats will not give you your way. It seems your father has taught you well, though. Keep up the good work. You will make a fine Dwarf diplomat some day."

"Yeah, a fine bossy and bratty Dwarf diplomat,"
Konaten murmured.

"Take that back!" Dorln yelled, his face even redder.

"No!"

"Take that back, now, or I'll kill you!"

"You would never do that," Konaten said.

"Try me," said Dorln.

"Rundelin!" Konaten cried, hiding behind me, "Dorln's
going to kill me!"

"I heard," I said, "but he was just kidding."

"No, actually I wasn't," Dorln said.

"Both of you stop it," Melepi said sternly, towering
over them, "Konaten, don't call Dorln names, and Dorln,
don't pick on Konaten."

"But he's a whiney wimp!"

"Dorln!" Melepi said louder, "Please stop it!"

"Yes, oh great wizard," Dorln muttered.

Melepi turned to the stairs, and we began following
him down, into the tower.

"I still don't understand about this teleport thing,"
I said, "What is it?"

"You'll understand soon," Melepi answered.

We went down four flights of stairs, and into a room which I knew as soon as I entered was the library. Thousands and thousands of books were placed organized on the shelves of the enormous room. I now understood why the wizards didn't want to blow it up.

"The closet's in the back," Codairem whispered, "That's where they'll be."

Melepi told us to stay back, and he walked halfway across the library alone. The door of the closet flew through the air, and landed with a crash in front of him.

Four arrows immediately launched towards him, but before they reached him they snapped in two and fell to the ground. Another arrow shot past him, and imbedded itself in a book that Codairem had taken from a nearby shelf.

"My book!" Codairem yelled, as he pulled out the arrow. The hole only went one fourth the way through his one-thousand page book.

"Come out cowards!" Melepi taunted, "Are you all too afraid to show yourselves?"

One stepped out of the dark closet, followed by an army of exiled Men, Elves, and Dwarves of Droken.

"I am Zengur, general of Xagwen," The one in the front said, "And you are all fools. You know that your power is not enough to defeat all of us!"

"You are correct," Melepi said, "Our power is not near enough to defeat you. But the power of Twillian is."

"Don't even start talking about Twillian... just surrender the tower now, and we'll--"

Before he could finish, he and the whole army disappeared before our eyes. Melepi fell to the ground, gasping.

Codairem, Regano, and I rushed to his side. Codairem helped him up.

"Are you ok?" he asked.

"I'll be fine," Melepi said as he tried to stand up, "I just need to rest. I've never tried to teleport that manybefore."

Regano looked out one of the tower's windows,

"There they are!" he said, "They're right outside the tower's walls! They're running now to the forest."

Now I understood what teleporting was.

It was now dark, and we began right away to work on gathering our defenses. Regano set to work making more veggie bombs, so they could be placed around the walls and thrown down at the enemies when they got close.

Melepi still looked very tired and weak, but he did his best to help Codairem.

Dorln and Konaten both insisted on fighting.

"I'm an expert warrior!" Dorln said, "I should fight!"

"An expert warrior, maybe, but also a child," Codairem said.

"But I should get a chance to serve Twillian just like the rest of you!" Dorln argued.

"He's right, you know," Melepi said to Codairem.

"But he's a child!" Codairem still protested.

"Still, if he wants to serve Twillian, we should give him the chance. However, I don't think he should be given too dangerous of a position. Dorln, would you accept helping the archers?"

"Yes," Dorln said eagerly, "I will!"

"Good. Your job will be to transport arrows to the archers."

"But--"

"If you truly want to serve Twillian, then you will accept whatever task He gives you."

Dorln sighed, "Fine, I accept."

Thus it was determined. Dorln joined the archers as their arrow disperser.

The wizards gave Konaten the position of helping Regano construct the veggie bombs and dispersing them amongst the soldiers.

After everything else was ready, Regano and I prepared ourselves to fight.

Regano picked up a small circular shield,

"Here, take this," Regano said, "It will do well with that sword Prime Minister Odorf gave you. There! With both of those, you look like a stunning soldier!"

"I only wish I could fight like a 'stunning soldier'," I said.

"You'll do fine. Maybe we won't have to fight at all, if they never get to the walls!"

I heard footsteps coming down the stairs, and saw Codairem as he entered the room.

"Hello," he said, "It's good to see you're both prepared. I'm sure they'll attack soon, based on what Hakelbak said. The storm is coming."

Regano looked puzzled, "A storm? The sky's been clear all day. I was hoping we'd get to fight in good weather."

"No, not an actual storm," Codiarem said, "It's an expression. It means that the battle will begin soon."

"I still don't see what this has to do with a storm, but oh well."

"I came down to tell you that Hyminstle's leaving," Codiarem said.

"He's leaving?! Why?" I asked.

"He's going to get help. We can't fight this battle alone. They have three armies- the army of Droken, the army of Hakelbak, and if what you say is true about Yentomere, which I'm sure it is, then soon they will also have the army of the Elves to help them. Each army alone is bigger than ours. We need help."

"But who?" I asked, "Zeanon? Pokocon? Reklawyk?"

"No," Codiarem answered, "None of those. It would be too difficult to get any of the Men to help us, and we've just received word that there is great trouble in Reklawyk."

"What kind of trouble?" Regano asked.

"Every region has split up for itself, and in the confusion, each is trying to take control of as much land as possible. The prime minister and his army are trying to defend Kywal."

"That's terrible!" I said.

"I know."

"Who told you this?" Regano asked.

"We've just received a message sent by carrier pigeon. It tells about the trouble in detail and explains why they cannot send help." Codairem took a letter from his cloak, "You can read it, if you'd like."

I took the letter. Regano stood close to me so he could read it too.

TO: The Wizards and all who dwell with them.

Greetings from Kywal. I hope that all is well for you, and that Rundelin, Hyminstle, and Nossada have made it safely. We sent Nossada to tell you that we would send help if you needed it; However, circumstances have changed. The regions of Reklawyk have split up. Lord Ibonek still remains loyal to us, but Lady Soal has

declared her region independent. We have just received a threat from her and Hakelbak. It says that we must give them all of our remaining lands, or they will take them by force. We all thought this was just an empty threat, until two days ago when they attacked. Ibonek and I are having a hard time fighting them off. We are afraid that we may lose this war. I write for my father, Former Prime Minister of Kywal, who died yesterday morning while defending Kywal. I am sorry that we cannot help. Me and my brother Evar would do anything if we could.

Prime Minister Ailar

Regano and I looked up from the letter.

"Prime Minister Odorf is dead?!" I cried.

"Yes," Codairem said, "It is terrible news, but we mustn't waste time mourning."

"So if not the Men or the Dwarves, then who are you sending Hyminstle to get help from?" I asked.

"From Endeland. Udrion and his armies are our only hope to save the Wizard Tower."

"Will they get here in time?"

"I hope so," Codairem said.

"I don't know about you fellows, but I'm going to go say farewell to the old chap." Regano said, as he headed up the stairs.

"I'm coming too!" I said, and I followed Regano, Codairem coming behind us.

Once we got to the top of the tower, I ran to Hyminstle.

"Goodbye Hyminstle!" I said, hugging him, "Thank you for everything you've done to help me! I hope you return safely back!"

"And I hope that there is somewhere left to come to when I return," he said.

Regano and the others said farewell also, and then Hyminstle flew up and disappeared into the sky (Literally, for he turned invisible).

We started to return to our work preparing for the battle, but then a call came from a guard at the front gate, "Codairem, Melepi, sirs! Come here immediately!"

Melepi stood up, though he was still tired from using his powers, and we all followed him around the tower walls to the stone gate.

"It's the Elves!" Codairem whispered, "Rundelin, Konaten, stand back until we call for you!"

Melepi and Codairem looked over the walls, but Konaten and I obeyed and stayed back.

"Good wizards!" Came the voice of my father, "I bring help from Lotenia! Open the gates and let us in!"

"Greetings, Yentomere," Codairem called down to them, "Tell us, how did you get through the enemy blockade?"

"We found the weakest spot and fought our way through. As you can see, some of us are wounded."

"Ha!" Regano whispered to us, "More like pretending to be wounded!"

"Can you open the gates now?" my father asked again, "We are getting tired of standing here."

"One moment," Codairem said, "First, we have someone who would like to say hello to you," He motioned for Konaten and I to come forwards.

"The Elf brats!!!" Yentomere yelled, "They're here?!"

"Brats? They're your children."

Yentomere screamed with anger,

"You will pay for defying me! You will all be dead by tomorrow!" With that he turned away and his army followed him back into the forest.

"My, you have such a... nice father...", Regano said after they had left.

"I still don't understand it," I said, "He was always a very loving father... until he betrayed Twillian and joined Xagwen."

"Strange. Oh well, let's get ourselves ready."

We spent the rest of the night preparing for the battle. After everything was ready, we took turns taking shifts on watch duty. Three people watched together, and four groups at a time. (One for each direction). When it came my turn, Regano woke me up, and both of us and Dorln went to watch the south side of the wall. If we saw the enemy we were to blow the horn they'd given to us, and then the rest of the watchmen around the tower would also blow their horns.

Regano and I held longbows, and Dorln held his father's old crossbow.

"Do you think they'll attack while we're watching?" I asked Regano.

"Oh no, I'm sure not. There are nine other groups rotating with us, and each one will probably get to go twice before anything happens. There's a very small chance that they will attack while we are here on watch duty."

War trumpets sounded. Warriors of Droken, Lotenia, and Reklawyk came from the surrounding forests.

"I guess I was wrong," Regano said.

Chapter 11

I grabbed the horn and blew. The noise of my own horn was soon joined by the sounds of the other watchmen's', and together the sound filled the tower and echoed off the stone walls. I watched as soldiers ran from their quarters, putting on armor, quivers of arrows, and other weapons as they did so.

"I have to go prepare the veggie bombs," Regano said, "I'll see you later, old bean. May Twillian be with you!"

"And may He be with you," I said.

He patted me on the back before he left.

Soldiers and archers ran up to the tower walls, and soon the wall swarmed with them.

"Positions!" A loud voice called.

I was pushed to a spot at the wall. The hordes of enemies were getting bigger by the second, as they came from the forests.

"Get ready your arrows!" the voice shouted.

I nocked an arrow into my bow and pulled back. Though I had practiced archery a lot in Lotenia, I never thought I would ever use it for this actual warfare.

"Commence fire!"

I released my arrow at the approaching hordes. I lost track of which arrow was mine in the huge cascade of arrows. Nearly every arrow fell short of the enemy lines.

"Hold fire!"

I lowered my bow. I searched for Codairem or Melepi amongst the soldiers but found neither.

The warriors of the enemy kept getting closer. More and more of them came out of the forest, and it seemed like they would never stop coming! I then realized that it was not just this one wall they attacked. Our soldiers stood at their stations all around the whole tower, and our foes circled around the tower for as far as I could see.

"Prepare your arrows!"

I nocked my arrow again and focused on the enemy below me.

"Commence fire!"

I aimed at the middle of the army. This time the volley hit the enemy lines. Some of the small figures below us fell. I nocked a third arrow into my bow. I fired again. More warriors below us fell, though others soon replaced them.

They acknowledged us with a shower of their own arrows. Several cries came from our walls, and an archer

close to me fell, screaming as an arrow hit his chest and protruded on the other side.

"Split up!" the voice called, "Half of you to the front with shields, and the others in the back with bows!"

The two soldiers on each side of me backed up, so I guessed that meant I needed my shield. I unstrapped the circular shield from my back and held it in front of me. I was just in time, for an arrow struck it as soon as I put it up.

"They've got catapults!" I heard someone yell.

"We're doomed!" someone else cried.

"We are not doomed!" The commanding voice shouted.

I looked behind me to my right, and saw Codairem, the one who had been directing us.

"With Twillian on our side, all things are possible!" Codairem yelled as we blocked another arrow volley,

"If we fight our best and do it for Twillian, our Maker, than we have won!"

Our archers fired again. I peeked out of my shield, and sure enough saw dozens of catapults emerging from the forests.

'At least they're not firing flaming catapult boulders at us!' I thought.

The tops of the catapults lit up into flames.

'Never mind.'

"All soldiers, cover yourselves with your shields!"

I obeyed.

In an instant something hit the Wizard Tower, for I felt the ground beneath me shake, and I heard cries from the other side of the tower.

"Stay shielded. The worst is still coming. They haven't fired at our wall yet."

Another explosion hit, much closer this time, and the force of it flung me backwards. I landed on top of someone.

"Get off of me!" Dorln yelled, "I can't breathe!"

I rolled off of him, and came to my feet. I wasn't hurt. The only damage done was to my shield, which now lay on the ground, a crumpled piece of metal.

"Next time you land on someone, please pick someone other than me!" Dorln said.

"Sorry Dorln."

I looked at the wall where the catapult blast hit. Several bodies lay on the ground, and part of the wall was in flames. Most of the others had not been as fortunate as I.

"Rundelin, are you just going to stand there, or are you going to do something?" Dorln asked, "If you don't mind, we need some help dispersing veggie bombs."

"Sure, I'll come," I gladly accepted, and I followed Dorln.

We went down a lot of stairs and through several passages before we got to the center of the tower.

"Regano and Konaten are in here," Dorln said.

He turned the door handle, and we entered.

I gasped when I saw how many veggie bombs had been made. Dozens of large boxes were stacked, each full of the explosives.

"Rundelin and Dorln, I'm mighty glad to see that you two are still here." Regano said, "Did you come to help us carry the bombs?"

In the back, Konaten rapidly threw seeds into large pots of dirt and splashed them with some water to make them grow into fruits and vegetables.

"Yes, we're here to help," I said.

"Good. We need all the help we can get. You two can each carry a box up, and give them to the soldiers to throw. We've already instructed them on how to use them."

I grabbed a large crate and headed for the door.

"Goodbye Rundelin!" Konaten said, "I'll see after the battle!"

"See you later!" I said, and smiled at him before I left the room with Dorln.

When we got back to the walls, we saw that things were getting worse. Many of our men ran back and forth carrying buckets of water to put out the fires that now blazed on the walls. Codairem ran to and fro, barking out orders.

Dorln and I hurried to him.

"We've brought the veggie bombs," I said.

Codairem stopped for a moment to talk to us,

"Good. Just in time. We need them. The enemy now have ladders, and they are getting closer and closer to our walls. Disperse the bombs among the soldiers at the walls, I'll tell them when to fire."

Codairem started yelling orders again, so Dorln and I began doing our job. It took about four trips before we'd handed out enough bombs for most of the soldiers.

The fires were now all under control, and most of our soldiers went back to their lines. The catapults were being moved away, but huge ladders took their place, many men carrying each one.

"All archers, ready," Codairem cried out, "All bomb-throwers ready. When I give the order, all soldiers release your arrows and throw your bombs at the enemy ladders below you."

"This is going to be fun," Dorln smiled, as we went close to the wall to watch.

"Hold... hold... hold... fire!!!"

Squashes, zucchinis, arrows, and watermelons assaulted the enemy. All of our efforts were rewarded by huge explosions below us, followed by massive cries from the enemy. The enemy lines stopped their steady march forward. The remains of the used-to-be ladders lay across the field, accompanied by bloodied corpses and body parts of soldiers.

A great cheer arose from the tower.

"Excellent work!" Codairem applauded, "Great job!"

Codairem stopped talking and his eyes grew wide.

"What's wrong?" I asked, but before he could answer a huge blast hit the Wizard Tower, and it threw me to the ground. I had to shield my eyes to block out the scorching light and heat...

I stood on the rampart that Codairem had stood on as commander. Words tumbled from my lips that I could not control...

"Excellent work... great job..."

I looked down at the armies of the enemy, and saw something... someone, coming from the forest. A caped figure dressed in black... he glowed a dark red and smiled sinisterly at me. Immediately I recognized this man to be Xagwen. Something was nearing me... a big ball of burning white flame. I had to move... no time! It struck me. I fell...

Now I stood at the palace in Lotenia, practicing archery with Konaten. I held my bow. I grabbed an arrow and nocked it onto my bow string. I focused hard on the target in front of me. It was far away... but it was close. I could see it clearly. I could see the bull's-eye. I pulled back my bow. I knew that my arrow would hit the bull's-eye. I let go. Konaten's eyes grew wide as he stared at my arrow sticking into the bull's-eye...

"Move faster! Block my strikes!"

Now I stood in the training quarters in Kywal. I fought against Nossada. His wooden sword moved to strike me.

I could feel the wind. I could feel how the sword swung through the air, and I knew where to move my sword. I blocked his blow. He swung again. I could hear the

sound of his sword whistling on the wind. I blocked. A third time he swung, and my sword blocked, before flying through the air towards him and striking him in the chest. He fell down.

"Rundelin, I thought you told me you'd never before handled a sword!"

Then the training quarters faded away, and Codairem appeared in front of me.

"It is Twillian's will that I give it to you," he said, "Use the power for Him."

He too then began to fade away.

"What do you mean?" I asked, "What power?"...

I opened my eyes.

"He's ok!" I heard Konaten said, "He's waking up!"

Konaten, Regano, and Dorln rushed to my side. I looked around me. I was in the infirmary, lying on a bed, as were dozens of wounded soldiers. Doctors and nurses frantically tried to help all of them.

"What... happened?" I asked.

"A big white, glowing fireball hit Codairem, and you fell and hit your head. I got help, and we dragged you here," Dorln answered.

"Codairem. Is he all right?"

"I'm afraid not, old chap," Regano responded, tears in his eyes, "He's gone."

"You mean he's--"

"He's dead," Melepi interrupted me, "And it's my fault."

"How is it your fault? You weren't even there. You were resting."

"Exactly. That's why it's my fault. If I would have been there..." He began to weep, and Regano put a hand on his shoulder.

"Yes," he said, "if you would have there you would have used your power to make a shield around you both. Then you would have collapsed from exhaustion and Codairem and you would be dead."

"But I could have tried!" Melepi said through his tears.

"Yes, tried and died. Your power is not unlimited."

Then I remembered my dream. Power. Codairem had said that he had given me power and to use it wisely.

"I just wish that at least we knew who Codairem's heir was," Melepi said.

"Codairem's heir?" I asked.

"Yes. Who he passed on his power to when he died."

"I had a dream," I said, "that Codairem told me he had given me power and to use it for Twillian."

"Oh, that's nonsense!" Dorln said, "You are not the heir of Codairem!"

Melepi was interested though,

"Is that all? Did anything else happen?"

"Well, yes. First I saw myself standing in Codairem's position at the wall. I saw Xagwen, then a ball of flame hit me. It seemed like I was Codairem."

"Go on."

I told them about all of the other dreams, and how my senses had been amazingly keen in all of them.

"I can't be sure, but I think that you are Codairem's heir!" Melepi said.

Dorln stifled a laugh.

"Can you still use the powers?" Melepi asked.

"Well, I never actually used them. I dreamed that I used them. And no, I can't."

"Try."

"Try? I don't know how!"

A soldier ran into the room, a wound in his left shoulder.

"Sir!" He said to Melepi, "We need orders. The ladders have reached the walls, and our supply of veggie bombs is growing dangerously low."

Melepi stood up.

"Are you sure you feel ok?" Regano asked.

"Yes. I have most of my strength back," Melepi answered, "Rundelin, we will have to talk about this later. Right now we have to fight."

I stood up and followed Dorln, Regano, Melepi, and the soldier back to the walls. Konaten stayed behind to make more bombs.

Everything looked the same on the walls, except for many more dead bodies, and the ladders. The tips of the enemy ladders poked up all around the tower, though no enemy soldier had made it up.. yet.

Melepi went right to his job. He yelled out orders to the soldiers, much like Codairem had done.

"Rundelin," Regano said, "Let's help push down ladders. The less ladders, the less enemies, and the less enemies, the greater the chance of our victory. All you have to do, is go over to a ladder, and push it."

Regano and I looked down at the soldiers climbing the ladder, "How do you do, old chaps?" Regano called, "Nothing

like a good climb right before a good fall, what, what?" With that Regano gave the wooden ladder strong push, and it and all of the screaming soldiers on it began to fall. A moment later I heard a crash, and the screaming stopped.

"Yep, that's all that's to it." Regano said.

I looked down where the ladder had fallen. All of the soldiers who had been on it were dead. There were many other ladders, though, and we would not be able to push down them all. I looked at the still massive armies of Elves, Dwarves, and Men. I looked closer. I saw a group of archers, led by- my father! It was him! I could even hear him speak,

"Aim!" he shouted, "And fire!"

I stopped looking at my father and the enemy archers, ducked for cover, and pushed Regano down with me.

A moment later a shower of arrows came above our heads, some of them finding a mark in our soldiers. The torrent of arrows stopped.

"How did you know that they were going to fire?"

Regano asked, "We might both be dead if you hadn't acted so quickly! You saved both of our lives."

"I... I don't know. I just looked down, and then I could see them like they were right by me, and hear my father give orders to shoot."

"I say, maybe you do have some kind of powers!"

Dorln walked by us, and heard what Regano said.

"How many times to I have to say it, Rundelin does not have powers of any kind!"

I heard the unsheathing of a sword near us. I unsheathed my own sword just in time to block a downwards blow from an enemy Dwarf. I grabbed his arm, pulled myself up, and thrust my sword into his chest. He fell dead at my feet.

"I apologize. Rundelin does have powers!" Dorln said, stepping back.

"I hope they come in handy," Regano said, "Because we might need them!"

Regano pointed behind me, and I looked. The warrior I had killed wasn't the only one. The time for arrows and veggie bombs was over. Enemies invaded the walls!

I ran towards the fight, where our own soldiers battled the opponents.

"For Twillian!" I yelled as I ran, and many others joined in the cry.

Sword raised high, I charged a traitor Elf. He blocked several of my strikes, and then swung for my legs. I jumped and dodged the swing.

I heard a soldier coming from behind. With a swift move, I whirled around, slicing the Drokenian's neck. The Elf took this opportunity to attack me, but I felt his sword coming, and blocked the attack before striking him a fatal blow in the chest.

I continued to fight, but even with my newly acquired powers, I could not fight forever. My strength and endurance remained the same, only my senses were enhanced.

Though we now had nearly defeated all of the present enemies on the tower, I knew that more ladders were coming and a still endless amount of warriors waited for their turn to climb one. Volleys of arrows from below killed both our men and the enemy's. Our own archers had taken up melee weapons to help fight.

I finished off another soldier by kicking him backwards and hurling him off the tower to his doom. A ladder hit against the wall beside me. I pushed it back to where it had come from, getting rid of several enemy warriors with it.

Many more ladders hit other places on the tower walls. More hordes of enemies invaded the tower. We had done a good job holding off, but we couldn't last much longer. We scarcely had a hundred soldiers on our side, against their thousands!

"The battle seems about hopeless, Regano," I said, as he fought beside me while I dodged a stab from a Dwarf's spear.

"It's not though," he said, "Not yet anyway. We still have a chance."

"Yeah," said Dorln, also near me, "Maybe a giant flaming rock will fall from the sky and kill the enemy army. Or maybe allied soldiers will suddenly appear in the sky and come help us."

"Look!" One of our soldiers shouted, "There's soldiers in the sky! I think they're coming to help us!"

"I say!" Regano stared at the sky, "He's right. There's an army of floating Satyrs!"

Dorln stared, his mouth hanging open.

I followed Regano's gaze and saw them. So many Daarekln filled the sky that I couldn't count them. Each held huge axes, maces, spears, or swords, and on each one a Satyr of Endeland (half human, half goat) perched. Every

Satyr wore a long quiver full of spears and carried one spear in each hand.

But one of the Daarekln did not carry a Satyr. A young man, dressed in golden clothes and eating a massive turkey leg stood on it, singing as he ate-

"To the tower we go,
To fight away the foe!
Some of us will live,
Some of us will die,
But those who do not live,
Will miss out on the pie!"

The Daarekln and the Satyrs soon joined in on the song. I stared longer at the man dressed in gold. There was only one person he could be. Udrion the Gold! The third wizard! And with a closer look at the Daarekln, I realized it was Hyminstle!

"That one's Hyminstle!" I pointed to him.

Regano and Melepi (Who had come to see what the matter was) stared at me like I was a lunatic.

"Um... Hyminstle's a Daarekln." Melepi said, "Those are Satyrs."

"Not the Satyrs! The Daarekln that are carrying the Satyrs!"

Melepi and Regano looked again.

"I don't see any Daarekln," Melepi said.

"What do you mean you don't see them? There's an army of them! One is carrying each Satyr!"

"Maybe there are Daarekln..." Melepi said, "But if there are, then they're invisible. None of us can see them, but you..."

"Oh, I get it!" Regano said, "Rundelin can see them because of his powers. All we can see are the Satyrs, because the Daarekln obviously didn't make them invisible."

"I can see invisible Daarekln?" I asked in wonder.

"Wow!" Regano jumped back, "Yes, you can see them when they are invisible. Because now they are not invisible, and we can all see them!"

"I still can't see Hyminstle though," Melepi said, "because there are so many Daarekln, and it's too far away for me to tell them apart."

"The one carrying Udrion," I said.

"Udrion? Yes, you're right, that is Udrion!" Melepi said.

Xagwen's army, who had been staring at the sky in shocked terror now once again began fighting, harder than ever. I too was again forced to fight.

I watched the Daarekln and Satyrs near us as I fought. On Udrion's signal all of the Satyrs released their spears at the enemy on the ground. The Daarekln flew directly over the enemy army, lashing out with their weapons and massive claws as they did so.

The fight had turned around, and now instead of seeming hopeless for us, it seemed hopeless for the enemy. Nothing could match an army of Daarekln... or so I thought.

Several Daarekln were scorched in mid flight, their Satyrs falling with them. Xagwen. This was his doing. Another Daarekln fell to its death, killed by Xagwen's ruthless flames. One of the Daarekln, realizing that Xagwen was the cause of his friends' death, charged him. With a quick uppercut from Xagwen's sword, this Daarekln died. The Satyr had fallen, but still lived. He slayed several warriors before he too died.

I slashed wildly at the enemy around me without looking, for I still watched the fight below. The Daarekln flew back to the skies, ordered so by Udrion.

By fighting they would only be committing suicide, for Xagwen still seemed strong as ever. Based on how much power he had used, he should be gasping for breath. It

took Melepi all of his energy to teleport the army out of the Wizard Tower.

Another ball of flame zoomed through the sky, finding its mark on another Daarekln. Somebody needed to do something. We couldn't let all of the Daarekln die. Xagwen needed to be stopped.

I pushed my way to the edge of the wall. I saw Xagwen, still fighting the Daarekln. I pulled my bow over my shoulders, and grabbed an arrow from my quiver. Though I knew a mere arrow could not stop Xagwen, it might distract him from the Daarekln... at least for a moment. I nocked, aimed, and fired, all in one swift motion. The arrow zoomed towards him, only to be fried by Xagwen's magic. He turned and looked right at me. Then he disappeared.

Where did he go? I stopped focusing my vision below, and turned around. Xagwen! He wore a sinister smile, and held his deadly sword in his hand

I jumped away to dodge his attack.

"You are foolish to still fight... Rundelin, was it? Do you not fear me?"

"Twillian is my light and my salvation- whom shall I fear?" I answered.

Xagwen winced, but otherwise ignored my comment, "You should have accepted Hakelbak's merciful deal. Now you will have to die." He swung again. I rolled away.

"You think Codairem and the Dwarf diplomat are the only ones who will die? No. All your friends will follow. Melepi. Udrion. The Daarekln. The diplomat's child. Your strange herb friend... Oregano. And your little brother. He will most certainly die."

This time I used my sword to block his downwards blow, and it shattered.

Xagwen's smile became more evil than ever as he pointed his sword towards me.

A small, angry form leapt onto Xagwen's back, and began choking him. Xagwen dropped his sword, but used his magic to send Dorln flying against the stone wall.

I came to my feet, but Xagwen threw me back to the ground, and I slid far away from him and Dorln.

"My, my, can't you pick on someone your own size, you big bully?" Regano said, shaking his finger right in front of Xagwen's face, "First a Dwarf child, then an Elf child! Terribly bad form, what, what?"

Xagwen shot forth a flaming ball at Regano, but to my amazement Regano's sword blocked it, extinguishing the flame.

The look of confidence on Xagwen's face faded, replaced by amazed bewilderment.

Regano lunged for Xagwen's sword, still on the ground, but Xagwen got there first, grabbed it, and slashed Regano slightly in the leg. This didn't stop Regano, though. Both opponents stood glaring at each other, their swords held in front of them.

Xagwen's sword burst into flames, and he smiled wickedly. Then, to my surprise, Regano's sword also burst into flames. (How he managed that, I never quite found out, though he mentioned something about a gift from the Giants). Xagwen's smile again left and became a confused scowl. Xagwen's sword met Regano's, and they began to fight. Regano could not match Xagwen's swordsmanship. Xagwen kept advancing forwards, while he forced Regano backwards, into the wall. Just when Xagwen almost succeeded in pushing Regano off of the tower, an arrow from Dorln's crossbow flew towards Xagwen. Xagwen stopped concentrating on the fight with Regano to block the arrow by scorching it in midair.

Xagwen was powerful, but he could not concentrate on too many things at once. This gave me an idea.

"Dorln!" I called, "Keep firing those arrows!"

"But he'll just deflect them," he yelled back.

"Trust me. Keep firing."

Dorln obeyed, and Xagwen once again had to give up killing Regano to save himself from the arrow.

I stood up and started running towards Xagwen.

After he blocked a blow from Regano and deflected a third arrow, he shot several balls of fire at me.

I felt them coming, and blocked one, and another.

He blocked Regano's sword.

He deflected an arrow.

He fired at me.

I dodged.

He blocked Regano's sword.

He deflected an arrow.

He fired at me.

I dodged.

And then I was upon him. Dorln stopped firing, and Regano stopped fighting, as I used all my strength to push Xagwen backwards.

"AHHHHHHHHHHH-" His screaming stopped abruptly as he hit the ground. A beam of darkness emanated from Xagwen's dead body. Regano, Dorln, and I watched, as did every other person on the battlefield, as it rose into the sky, and then struck a spot on the ground. A crater remained where it hit- all that was left of Xagwen.

"Pride comes before a fall," Regano said, shaking his head.

#

After Xagwen fell, the battle ended. The Daarekln could join back into the fight, and it wasn't long before Hakelbak (Who had taken up command of the enemy army) pleaded for surrender. We accepted this proposal. We kept all of the remaining enemy soldiers captive until we were finished burying the dead and recovering from the battle.

Later, outside of the Wizard Tower, we helped search for survivors.

"My!" Regano declared, "That crater looks even bigger from down here! Let's go take a look at it."

Dorln, Hyminstle, Konaten and I followed Regano to the crater where the beam had hit after Xagwen died.

"There's someone in there!" Dorln said, pointing to a form in the center of the crater.

"Dorln's right!" Hyminstle said, "And he's still alive! He's moving!"

"Father!" Konaten and I said at the same time.

The person in the crater was indeed Yentomere. Our father.

Konaten and I slid down the crater's side and ran over to him.

He stared at us and smiled, struggling for breath as he spoke,

"Rundelin! Konaten! You're... here!"

"Yes. We've been here a long time," I said, "You already knew that. You talked to us earlier. Remember, we're the 'Elf brats'."

Yentomere's smile faded, "Rundelin..."

He began coughing violently, and we stood there quite a while before he could talk.

"It... it wasn't me..." He began coughing again, and when his coughing ceased, he was motionless.

Konaten started crying. I hugged him, and together we stepped out of the crater.

"What happened?" Regano asked.

"He's dead." I answered.

#

"But what did he mean?" I asked.

"Why your father would say 'it wasn't him' is beyond my comprehension," Regano answered.

"I know, it doesn't make sense!" I said.

Melepi and Udrion entered the room,

"Rundelin, I've been thinking," Melepi said, "You know how your father was inside of that crater?"

"Yes."

"And the beam that came from Xagwen when he died hit that spot and made the crater?"

"Go on."

"I think that Xagwen passed on his power to your father!"

"My father?! Why would Xagwen choose my father of all people?"

"He would probably choose either him or Hakelbak."

"True. But if Xagwen passed his power on to my father, than who did my father pass the power onto? My father died too, which would mean that he would also have to have an heir. And no big beam of light came from my father when he died."

Melepi pondered this, "I don't know. It's all very confusing."

"I agree!" Regano said, "Who passed their power onto whom, and who they passed their power onto. And why your father would say what he said, and why he would go from a nice loving father to an evil despicable villain. It all makes my brain hurt."

"I know. Let's stop frying our brains, and get something to eat." Udrion suggested, "I promised all of the survivors that they would have a feast."

Regano's face lit up, "Hey, Udrion. Would you care for a juicy pear? They're extra large!"

Melepi and I hurried away, and left Udrion to Regano and the villainous pear.

#

Every person who helped in any way to fight against the wizards were banished forever to Droken. Uwar, the doctor from Lotenia who murdered my former tutor, Tumbrin, was among them. He tried to convince us that he didn't try to kill Tumbrin, and that he had always remained loyal to the wizards, but when we questioned him as to why then he helped attack the Wizard Tower, he was speechless. He went along with the others to Droken.

We sent word of all that happened to the Giants of Watac. They sent a Giant to the Wizard Tower to speak with us.

"May I ask," Melepi said to the Giant, "how Xagwen and an army of that size crossed through your lands and made it here? Your job is to make sure nobody leaves Droken."

"I know." The Giant said, "Xagwen and his army passed through the center of Watac, which is our farm lands. It is a very unsettled area. Even if they would have come through a more settled region, we would not be able to fight them. We are pacifists. You know that."

"Yes, but you at least should have sent word to us that the army was coming. If it wouldn't have been for Rundelin, we would be dead right now, and Xagwen would rule Twilland!"

"We would have sent you a message, but the farmers just told us a few days ago. They were too busy repairing their farms that Xagwen's army stole from and ravaged. We don't blame them. They have to have food to eat."

"He has a point." Udrion whispered to Melepi, "Food is very important."

Melepi turned back to the Giant,

"We don't blame you for Xagwen's army escaping Droken. But next time, make sure the farmers tell you immediately, and then send us a message."

"Don't worry, if it ever happens again, we promise to send a message. Hopefully it won't happen again anytime soon. Xagwen is dead, after all."

"Yes. Hopefully it will never happen again."

The Giant returned to Watac. Soon after he left, Konaten told us that Hyminstle wanted us outside.

We came outside, and found all of the surviving Daarekln (Now only about fifteen in number), waiting there.

"Rundelin!" Hyminstle said, "I wanted you to come so I

could say farewell. Again. This time it's permanent though."

"Permanent? What do you mean?"

"I am going with my people. We are all leaving Twilland."

"You're going to Endeland?"

"No. We do not know exactly where we are going, but we feel that Twillian wants us to go. We will go past where the maps chart. Twillian will guide us. None of us will ever return."

I brushed away tears, and hugged Hyminstle. For the last time. Udrion cried more than anyone, at the loss of his best friend.

"I'll miss you, Hyminstle," he said, hugging him.

"Goodbye peoples of Twilland! We go now!"

We watched as the last of the Daarekln flew away. They had no need to turn invisible.

Chapter 12

Though we were still sad that the Daarekln left, we couldn't grieve forever, and got right back to cleaning up the battlefield and attending to the dead and wounded.

Once we finished everything, the tower repaired and the traitors banished, Udrion held his victory feast in the Wizard Tower. Dozens of tables were set up, each full of food of all kinds. There were turkey legs, fruits, vegetables, roasted pig, all kinds of breads and soups, pastries, cakes, pies, and many other delicacies.

"This is my kind of feast!" Regano said, stuffing a pastry into his already full mouth.

"So, you also appreciate the value of food?" Udrion asked after biting into a turkey leg.

"Why, of course, old bean!"

"Any friend of food is a friend of mine!" Udrion said, and they both shook hands.

After the banquet ended, Melepi invited everyone up to his quarters.

"As most of us know, Rundelin is Codairem's heir." Melepi said, "I have discussed this with Udrion, and we

have decided that Rundelin will be formally made a wizard. However, there are several tests that Rundelin must accomplish before he becomes a wizard."

"Tests?" I asked, "What kind of tests?"

"Difficult tests." Udrion answered, his face stern.

"Do all wizards have to take these tests before they become wizards?" I asked.

"Yes." Melepi said, with the same strict look, "The first test is easy. You have to run all the way around the tower. It helps build endurance."

"That won't be that hard."

"And you have to carry Dorln on your shoulders."

"What?" I asked.

"Hey!" Dorln said, "Why me?"

"Well, we were considering using Udrion, but we decided that he was a little too big."

"Well," I said, "I guess I should get started. Come on Dorln, let's go."

#

Later that night I studied the 3000 page book "Philosophy and Logic of Twilland" and the 2000 page book "Simple Mathematics" (It was not simple!). After nearly fainting carrying Dorln on my back around the Wizard Tower, I had taken the second test- a fight against Udrion. We could both use our powers, which I thought would be easy enough, until Udrion used his power to drop watermelons from the sky and trip me with a vine. He'd won, but they said that I needed only to beat two of the three tests... but the third was impossible!

After studying the books for two and a half hours, I could not study a moment longer! I was supposed to study tonight, and in the morning take the written test, but I just couldn't do it! I decided that Melepi and Udrion had gone too far, and I was going now to tell them that I refused to take the test. I took the books with me. If I could not become a wizard, then so be it.

I knocked on Melepi's door.

"Come in," he said.

I entered. Melepi, Udrion, Regano, Dorln and Konaten sat down in the room. While I worked hard and studied, everyone else had been relaxing!

I immediately began telling them my complaints.

"I know that it may be necessary for me to become a wizard, but I refuse to take this last test! It is not just hard, but impossible! I don't know what in all of Twilland made you think that I could possibly understand the material in those books. You may be smart enough to understand those things, but I am not a scholar, or a mathematician, or anything close! If I cannot officially become a wizard, then so be it, but I am not taking this test!"

I stopped talking, and realized that everybody else in the room was laughing.

"What's so funny?" I asked.

"You actually believed us!" Udrion chuckled, "You actually did the tests, and thought we were being serious!"

"Wait... this was all a joke?!"

"Righto, chap." Regano grinned, "And you fell for it!"

"You mean I didn't have to carry Dorln on my back while I walked around the Wizard Tower, face Udrion, or study Codairem's boring books?"

"Nope." Melepi said.

I hurled the "Simple Mathematics" book in his direction.

#

After Melepi and Udrion formally pronounced me as the heir of Codairem, Melepi talked to me alone.

"Rundelin," he said, "now that your mission is over and the battle won, where will you go?"

I pondered this. I had not thought about this at all. It would be my responsibility as firstborn son of Yentomere, former king of Lotenia, to take his place. But I didn't want to become king. That had always been Konaten's dream, not mine.

"I don't want to go back to Lotenia," I said, "I don't want to become king."

"Good," Melepi's face brightened, "because you can't."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"A wizard cannot become king. It is too much power for one man to carry."

Relieved, I asked, "Will Konaten become king? Or is he too young?"

"Yes, he will become king of Lotenia. For a while he must have someone to help him manage things, but when he turns ten he can become the full king. Of course, this is only if he wants to be king. If not, someone else must be found."

"I'm sure that he wants to!" I reassured him.

"Then soon Konaten will be Lotenia's new king!"

#

Two weeks later, in the royal hall of Lotenia, Konaten's coronation ceremony began. All loyal Elves of Lotenia lined the streets, on both sides. We had chosen Gushrog, Tumbrin's cousin who helped us succeed in our mission, to serve as Konaten's mentor and help him until he turned ten.

The people cheered as Konaten walked down the marble stairway, to where Melepi, Udrion and I stood. As the wizards of Twilland, it was our job to appoint him as

king.

I listened as Melepi and Udrion went through the long coronation speech, and then finally it came time for me to say the final words that would make him king.

Melepi handed me the crown, and as I placed it upon Konaten's head I shouted loudly for all to hear:

"Konaten, king of Lotenia!"

The crowd cheered in a thunderous roar that echoed across the entire city.

"Your majesty, would you like some cake and dried apricots?" I asked.