

Benhart sneaked through the tall wheat stalks as he made his way to the small fortress at the top of the hill, the crescent moon shone brightly in the sky and the ground was coated in a light mist. Benhart had never been to the fortress before, he didn't know anybody who had. The people of the village knew very little about what was inside the fortress. He had heard it used to be an army training ground during the war time, but nobody had used it since the land had been retaken by his countrymen. He had heard that there was talk to repair the dilapidated ruins that the fortress had become but when some men had gone to inspect it they found that the fortress was no longer empty. It was now guarded by soldiers, foreign and local. Nobody knew what was inside. But the soldiers never came into the town. They never made an attempt, they just guarded the fortress on the hill. At least for a while.

About three months after the soldiers had been found at the fortress, one finally ventured outside and went to explore the town. Benhart was only eight years old at the time so he didn't quite understand what was going on, all the townspeople were wary of the soldier who made his way to the market, they didn't know why he was there nor what he was going to do. Benhart remembered his mother trying to usher all his brothers and sisters into the house but he slipped away when his baby sister started to cry. The soldier walked to a store and said nothing, but he pointed at some supplies before putting out some coin. Once he had looked over all the stores and brought enough supplies to last a single man for a month, he headed back to the fortress. He did not come back the next day and it seemed as though everything had gone back to normal, but one month later another soldier made its way to the market. Once again he brought enough supplies to last a single man a month. Benhart had found this peculiar but he couldn't quite figure out why.

One night, when Benhart was ten years old, a group of villagers had armed themselves made their way to the fortress to try and get some answers. They came back bewildered and confused. Everyone gathered around the group as they told the village their story. They had walked towards the fortress, expecting to be greeted by a guard, but instead they found themselves walking straight past it. Whenever they had tried to get close to the fortress they would drift out of consciousness like they had been taken over by a spell. Then when they would break from the trance they would find themselves having walked far past the fortress. And so it was decided that the fortress was now being occupied by a wizard. One who did not wish to be bothered.

But Benhart still had questions. If there was a guard detail at the fortress, why did they only ever buy enough supplies for one man? When he asked the adults in the village they told him not to worry about the old wizard on the hill. Nobody could do anything about it so they would try to ignore it. that wasn't good enough for him, he

wanted to know about the man living in the tower and why he refused to talk to the townsfolk. So he made up his mind. He would sneak into the fortress.

When Benhart told the people of his intentions to find this wizard they warned him not to approach the castle. Nobody knew anything about the mysterious wizard and they wouldn't allow a young boy anywhere near someone they knew nothing about. A young girl went missing from the town, she was sixteen and was to be wed to the mayor's son. There were talks that she had simply run away from the arranged marriage, some said that she was kidnapped by the wizard. So Benhart decided that regardless of what anyone said he would sneak into the castle. He was thirteen, practically an adult. He could make his own decisions. So in the dead of night he left his home in the village and approached the mysterious fortress.

He had done it. After sneaking through the tall grass and wheat he had arrived at the castle. His mind was clear and he had not been placed under the effects of any spell, he was either immune to the spell or the old wizard had not noticed his presence. He shuffled along the wall, his back pressed to the cold stone as he tried to find an entry point. As he moved around one of the outer towers he could see lamplight glowing out the window, and he could hear furious scratching of a quill upon paper. Benhart decided that must be where the wizard was working.

He could see a guard looking out onto the road near the entrance to the fortress, standing alert, completely still and silent. Even though it was cold out no puffs of steam were escaping from his mouth, almost as if the soldier was not breathing at all. A sharp crack sounded as Benhart accidentally stepped on a large twig, but the guard did not turn around nor react to it if he heard it. Benhart's heart was pounding as he slipped into the courtyard.

The courtyard was surprisingly clean, any rubble that had been there had been cleared out. There were vibrantly coloured plants against one of the walls that seemed to glow with colour despite how dark it was. There were training dummies and weapon racks as one would expect of a training ground, and there was also a small shooting range with a few targets standing. There was no-one patrolling the grounds except for a guard who sat on a bench looking at the plants across the yard. Benhart mustered up his courage and decided to investigate the strange guard detail that the fortress was patrolled by. He quietly snuck up next to the guard. If he was noticed he couldn't tell as the guard made no reaction to his presence. A small bird flew into the courtyard before landing near the plants. Benhart noticed that the guard had actually moved when the bird entered its field of vision, the guard now gripped a bow with a notched arrow and stared intently at the bird. As the bird jumped towards the plants the guard loosed an arrow in its direction, scaring the bird away before he sat back down upon his bench and resumed staring at the plants. The moon shone

through a cloud illuminating the guards face. Benhart took a few steps backwards, horrified by what he saw. The mans skin was dry, missing in places and his eyes were blind. Benhart realised that the man he had saw was not a member of the living. The guards of the fortress were in fact undead. Benharts mind raced as he put together the pieces. If the guards of the fortress were undead then that would mean that the wizard was in fact. A necromancer.

Benhart had broken out into a cold sweat. He had always heard terrible tales of necromancers and the evils that they committed. He felt like he needed to run as far as he could from the fortress and to climb back into the bed at his home, but he quickly calmed himself down, he could reach one of the swords on the weapon rack without being seen. So he decided that he would kill the necromancer.

Benhart shifted ever closer to the door of the tower, he had made it to the top of the wall without being seen by any of the guards but he did not feel brave enough to move quickly to the door. Every now and then a loud sound would emit from behind the door as the wizard tested a spell before cursing and resuming writing on some paper loudly. As Benhart got to the door and reached for the door handle he could hear the muffled voice of another person in the room. He couldn't understand what it was saying but he recognised who it belonged too. The girl who had gone missing from the village. So the villagers were right, the wizard was responsible for the disappearance of the girl. Benhart exhaled, steeling himself for the encounter where he would kill the wizard before opening the door.

He ran into the room, his sword at the ready, but he stopped dead in his tracks when he saw the hard gaze of a man staring directly into his eyes. The wizard was not nearly as old as the village had thought he was. He looked to be just twenty six years old, but his eyes were cold and his lips were firmly locked into a scowl. One leg resting sideways atop the other with his arms folded across his lap. Behind him were an assortment of documents with scribbles and diagrams all over them, most were crossed out. to the wizards left there were a pair of beds. One was empty, but atop the other sat the girl who had gone missing. She was not tied up like Benhart had expected her to be, in fact she looked quite comfortable, like she had chosen to live with the wizard of her own accord. The room was filled with bookshelves that were overflowing with countless books. There were clearly not enough shelves as the floor had piles of books scattered around randomly. Benhart could feel the hateful gaze of the wizard burning into him as he looked around.

“Well?” the wizard spoke harshly surprising Benhart. “What did you want.” Benharts mind went blank for a second, unable to think of anything to say to the wizard, he had not expected the wizard to know that he was there so quickly.

“Get on with it already! You have three questions.” the wizard was getting frustrated with him, so he quickly decided on the first thing he should ask.

“Why did you kidnap her.” Benhart stuttered as he gestured to the girl. The wizard's gaze remained focused on him, ignoring his gestures towards the girl on the bed as he replied.

“I didn't.”

“They why is she here?”

“She decided that she wanted to be my apprentice.”

“Why are you here?”

“Because it's quiet and I wanted to be left alone.”

“Why don't you ever come into the village?” The wizard ignored him, still staring him dead in the eyes, Benhart cleared his throat and spoke again. “Why don't you ever come into the village?”

“I have already answered three questions.”

“What?” The wizard ignored Benhart again, his jaw was locked and it was clear that he would answer no more questions, But Benhart refused to take no for an answer, he had come this far but he hadn't gotten any information that he wanted. So he began to ask one more question.

Benhart suddenly found himself back in the village, he didn't quite know what had happened at the fortress, he only knew that he had made it inside and spoken to the wizard, he didn't know what the wizard has said but he felt as if he had all of his questions answered, not that he could remember any questions. So he calmly strolled back into the village before sneaking into his warm bed.