

Chapter 25: Brian Makes a Plan

"I trust you've been enjoying our hospitality?" Risoart said sarcastically.

"You have no idea how good it feels to be back in the forest," Brian said, biting into a ripe apple. "It's so hard to find good food in the mountains."

"Yes, I'm sure," said Risoart. "No wonder everyone turns into a carnivore in the mountains."

"Yes, you can't blame them really," Brian said. "Food is so scarce up there. It's not like in the forest where there is so much delicious food just hanging from the trees."

"It is a little paradise down here, isn't it?" Risoart said flatly. "I'm sure a man would say anything to get back here."

Brian stopped chewing, and put the apple down. "Now, what's that supposed to mean? Surely you know everything I've told you is true."

"I don't trust anything as a matter of principle," Risoart said. "So when something sounds unbelievable, I'm inclined not to believe it."

There was a small silence. Then Brian prompted Risoart. "But?"

Risoart sighed. "But, the man talked. It took a couple of days' work. He didn't want to say anything until we forced it out of him. But everything he said confirms your story. He told us about the twins on the mountain."

Brian picked up his apple again and took another bite. "I know how you feel. You don't like having to trust me."

"I don't," Risoart said.

"But here we are," Brian said gleefully.

"Here we are," Risoart admitted.

"Risoart, don't be so glum. This is your golden opportunity. It's not every day a chance like this just drops into your lap. Ambrosia will reward you amply for this."

"You're right. I wish it was someone else who delivered this news, but, well, here we are. I've assembled a troop of soldiers..."

Brian shook his head. "No. No. No troop of soldiers. Just you and me, and maybe one or two other men that you trust."

"I'm not going into the mountains unprotected," Risoart insisted.

"What do you mean unprotected? I'll be there to guide you. I know a thing or two about surviving in the mountains. I've survived for over ten years."

Risoart looked unconvinced. "Thank you, but I'd prefer to have my men with me."

"No, look, you can't. If we came up the mountain with a whole troop of soldiers, they'd know we were coming before we even got there. The girl, you see, she has this special bond with the ravens. They bring her information."

"So what? Do you think she has a chance against my troop of soldiers?"

“Well, I wouldn’t underestimate her. Remember she’s got Ambrosia’s blood in her veins.”

“Even Ambrosia couldn’t defeat a whole troop of soldiers on her own.”

“They’re not on their own. They’ve got a lot of friends in the mountains. But it’s not even a fight I’m worried about. What I’m worried about is that they’ll hear we are coming, and they’ll disappear into the mountains. It’s very hard to find someone in the mountains who doesn’t want to be found. Now, if I go back up into the mountains, that won’t surprise anyone. I live up there. They know me. And if you come back with me, they’ll just assume you’re one of my friends. And I think we can take a couple more of your men if you’re worried. But any more than four of us, and we’ll start to raise suspicions. The key is going to be to catch them off-guard. We get in the house, we grab them, we get out, and we take them back down to the forest before anyone can stop us.”

“And how are we going to get into their house?”

Brian smiled. “Ah, that you can leave to me. I’m a family friend.”