

Chapter 17: Preparing

“Why did you leave?”

“I had to. You know that. Oh, Midor, we’ve been through all this before. Why do you bring it up again?”

“I kept coming back. Every year, I came back to the castle. I kept asking to see you, but the guards kept turning me away.”

Vivian paused. “I didn’t know that,” she said. “I didn’t know you kept coming back.”

“What did you think I did?”

“I don’t know. I guess I just assumed you went on with your life, and I went on with mine.”

“Your father never told you I kept returning? No, of course he didn’t.”

“But you never told Robert?”

“I told him I was going to visit the elves every year. I left him in the care of the nymphs. He never knew about you or the castle.”

“Why didn’t you tell him?”

“What was there to tell? That he had a mother who was refusing to see him?”

“I never... I never refused to see him.”

“Your father would never have let him and I in.”

“My father would never have let you in.”

“Your father still won’t let me in. He just told me to get out of here before the monsters come.”

“So what will you do?”

“This is my forest. If those monsters do get loose, you’re going to need all the help you can get.”

“You were always the noble one. But where will you sleep? The spirits are out, you know. You can’t sleep on the ground like you usually do. And the people won’t let you in their house.”

“I’ll sleep in an animal den then. There are some wolves behind that hill who have a place just large enough for me to crawl into.”

“So undignified. Sleeping in holes like an animal.”

“Undignified for you. But I was never of royal blood, remember? I was always a low-born ranger. I live with the animals.”

She laughed. “All the creatures in this forest respect you as if you were a king.”

“If they do, it’s not because I live in a castle,” Midor answered.

General Graten returned with hundreds of his soldiers, who helped Talon fill in the chamber. They filled it all up, and then placed rocks and big boulders on top of it. It took a lot

of big strong men working for days, but they managed to first fill in the chamber completely with dirt, and then put rocks and stones on top of it.

Midor watched them from a distance. (King Carlyle had forbidden him to interfere). Robert and Henry came over to talk to Midor. “That won’t hold them,” Midor said to Robert and Henry. “The things I saw in there, those rocks won’t hold them.” Midor turned to look at Henry. “You are a prince of Mora, aren’t you? This forest isn’t your fight. You may want to get out of here while you can?”

Robert laughed. “Dad, you don’t know Henry at all. He’s been waiting for a moment to show himself a hero his whole life.”

Henry blushed. “I do not seek glory,” he said. “But I will never run from a fight. My sword is ready to serve you and your King.”

“My King,” said Midor sarcastically. “He won’t even let me in his forest. I’m not even supposed to be here right now.”

Every day, the royal family practiced their training. They practiced their aim with arrows, they practiced throwing spears, and lunging with swords. Henry and Grace joined in the training.

The howling of the ghosts at night grew less and less. Talon was spending more of his time actively controlling them now. And Midor was no longer calling out from the other realm, which had accounted for much of the noise before.

Then, within a couple days, scouts brought in reports that an army of goblins was approaching.

“This happens sometimes,” Thomas explained to Henry, Grace and John. “Grandfather’s quite good at dealing with them usually. Sometimes they can be reasoned with, and sometimes they can be bargained with, and sometimes we have to fight them. But Grandfather’s always dealt with them in the past. The problem now is the timing. We can’t focus on preparing for the monsters if we have to deal with the goblins.”

“What do they want?” asked Henry.

“They like to travel through the forest, terrorizing folks, and trying to get gold. Goblin’s love gold. But they’re quite small. They only come up to my knees. They’re only usually a problem for small woodland creatures. Or for children who wander alone in the woods. Or sometimes if they catch you alone and outnumber you, they can gang up on you. But whenever we get all of our people together and go out and fight the goblins, they don’t stand a chance. They’re mostly just an annoyance. Or they would be. The problem is, we don’t have the time to deal with them now. The last thing we want is to be dealing with the goblins while the ancient monsters emerge.”