

My eyes came to focus on a young elven girl dressed in strange but somewhat familiar clothing. She had shoulder length dark brown hair and amber colored eyes. I was still a little dazed. "Where? Who... who are? Where is she?"

The girl answered. "My name is Raina (Rine-ah) you are in our village now, out of the cold you have been sleeping for almost six days was unsure you would ever wake up, you must be hungry." She handed me a bowl of soup and some bread. My stomach growled like a ravaged beast, I took it quickly. "Man mathach (Mahn mah-thakh)?" she asked. Without hesitation, I replied "I feel better now, thank you. How did I get here?"

"My father, Imrathon (Eem-rah-thonn) and uncle were hunting when they came across your half frozen body. There wasn't much life left in you, but our healers managed to cure your fever, and heal your frostbitten hands. Who is Sanya? Was she with you?"

"How do you know of her? Where is she?"

"You called her name out in your sleep, but there was no one else in the woods that night."

"She is my sister; she was taken by the dark ones."

"The Dark Ones?" Raina asked puzzled.

I explained to her what had happened.

Raina stayed close to me, she told me tales of her village, UnqueDol (un-quay dole) and her people.

It was a week's time before I could muster enough strength to return to my feet. I explored UnqueDol. It reminded me of my village, I was treated much like an unwelcome guest by many. Everywhere I walked I could feel the stares at my back. And when confronted with my glance, heads turned sharply away, as if my very look was the plague. I could hear the whispers and remarks from those that wandered among.

When I was old enough to earn my keep, I learned the ways of smithing. After long days of fixing armor and weapons, I watched the elvan warriors practicing. It reminded me of my father's training and the war stories he told us so many years ago. I asked every day, "Imrathon, would you teach me?" Every day he replied the same, "I will not train a half-breed." As the time past, the villagers began to open up and trust me. Some showed me wilderness survival, others tracking and hunting. Raina convinced her father to give me a chance. Although in Imrathon's eyes I was a half-breed, I had earned his trust over the years and he agreed to train me in the ancient ways of combat.

Raina and I walked about the village almost every night. She was a good friend as well as the first person who ever accepted me out side of my family. Over the years she had taken a liking to

me and I had to her. With the sun beginning to fall over the mountains, we heard screams nearby. We raced to the scream, to find a large beast with blood dripping from its teeth and claws. A small body was slumped underneath the beast's shadow. "Raina, go get help! I will handle this!" I readied my blade and lunged. The beast dodged and swung back knocking me down, then it jumped at me. I rolled to my right and struck to my left almost simultaneously. My blade sunk deeply into its shoulder, and with a blood curling howl, it took off into the thick woods, where it had come from. It had not been the first time this beast has terrorized the village.

"Gabe, are you hurt?" Raina returned with the healers and other warriors.

"I'm fine, tend the little one, I will return with the head of the beast!" The words spoken, some nights before, lingered in my head "Bring me thy jaw of thy beast that is spilling thy blood of innocence." This time I will not fail. Making no haste, I tracked it for about two hours before finding the beast's corpse lying, limp. "Odd," I thought, my single strike could have not been that lethal. I looked around and grabbed it by its hind legs. I began to drag it back. Suddenly, an unseen force knocked me down. I drew my sword. "That's my dinner." My blade moved toward the voice.

"Yours... Yours? Who are you to claim what you never possessed?" I said with the tip of my sword pressed on his face.

"Look I'm hungry, I haven't eaten in days, I don't know where I am, or where I'm going" pleaded the stranger.

"Who are you, and where do you come from?" I Replied.

"I am called Nightphlox. I don't know where I'm from. I had an accident and have lost all previous memory" said the stranger.

"What an odd name, Nightphlox, but this animal is mine." I said

"I'm hungry" Nightphlox replied holding his stomach.

With a sigh I replied "Well, my interest does not lie in the meat. If you wish, I will share the meat, but the jaw is mine." He nodded. I cautiously lowered my sword. I pulled my dagger and started carving the beast.

Nightphlox grew confidence as I sheathed my blade. He took a piece of meat and arrogantly asked. "Well, since we are now so cordially acquainted, what, may I call you by?"

I looked at him for a moment and said "Gabe" He then reached for another piece of raw meat "Don't you think you should go fetch some kindling for a fire, Nightfox? We are not savages, and I refuse to eat like one." He seemed not too happy and murmured something but I was too tired to mind. Darkness was falling quick much too dangerous to head back tonight. I decided to rest my eyes a bit. Sword close to hand, I didn't trust this Nightphlox. I arose at the first sight of

dawn. Nightphlox was sound asleep; I took what I had come for, and started my journey back to UnqueDol.

I returned to the Elder Eruestan (Air-oo-ehs-tahn). "I've brought the final piece; please tell me where to find Sanya."

"Sit be patent this will take some concentration." He took the jaw broke it and sprinkled a substance on it. He spoke in tongues I've never heard before. Ancient elvish, I believe. A gust of wind blew into the hut candles flickered and then he said. "Seek thy one who knows not where he may be, nor where he goes next. He will show thine path to thy answers of thy past." Eruestan's riddle was not much help. For it had been years and I mustn't waste any more time. I did what was asked now I must move on, to find a lost stranger who knows the path to my past. Damn riddles! It seems to be more riddles than answers. I feel I'm getting closer but something keeps me away. Suddenly realizing the man I met the eve before was the one he spoke of. Frustrated, I slammed my fists on the Elder's table. As small trinkets clang on the floor; I yelled "Why does every path lead to another path and not to a destination! I'm like a dog chasing its tail. I'm getting nowhere!"

He had never seen an ounce of anger pulse threw my veins and replied, "Only the Gods can distribute fate and fate knows no destination so your destination if you shall call it that will not satisfy as you believe it will. For as you stated all paths lead to other paths. Hence forth Gabe your time is near leave quietly and unannounced for your duty in this village has come to an end. Namárië (Nah-MAR-ee-AY)" still frustrated I left.

I went back to Raina's home for supplies. "Gabe? Where are you going?"

"I must go. My sister is still out there I can feel it, she needs me. There is someone who knows about her disappearance, I need to find him. You understand... right?"

"Yes, but..." she answered.

"Listen, for over 17 years you have been there for me. You have been my friend, my family and so much more. Take this," I removed the amulet, I held so dear and placed it around her neck and with a kiss "it was my mother's, I want you to have it. I will see you again, I promise" I finished gathering supplies and mounted my black stead.

I headed north towards the camp we made the night before. Found his tracks, they continued north. "He must be heading to Bristol". I had to find Nightphlox he could be only a day or two ahead. I need to make up some ground. Moving swiftly threw the woods using every shortcut I knew. The thought of Nightphlox having the answers kept me moving. Yet I wondered, for a man I have met but once, he seemed to know nothing and I was told he might know all. Why he

would know about my past? Was he part of it? Was he one of those things that murdered my parents and took my sister? I had to find out. "One way or another he, WILL tell me what he knows." With frustration building, I picked up the pace. I knew that I could reach Bristol by nightfall.

With the moon high above, I heard some voices in the distance, I saw Nightplox as I came to a clearing just outside the gates of Bristol. Quietly I dismounted and crept closer, to hear the voices more clearly, "... for yesterday, as I stated you were needed where you were, also since you had arrived early, you needed to leave because someone else needed to catch up, ISN'T THAT RIGHT, GABE?" Without hesitation I ran out of the brush and swung my sword at Nightplox. My blade grazed his arm as he jumped out of the way "WHERE IS SHE?" I lunged again with a downward swing, only to miss yet again, my blade struck soft muddy ground and it stuck.

"I don't know what you're talking about Gabe." he replied.

"LIES!" I charged at him with everything I had, we both hit the ground hard. Nightplox grabbed my throat and I in turn grabbed his. Tighter and tighter my hands clinched, he turned unnatural colors. The air was starting to get thinner and thinner. Both choking and gasping for breath.

"ENOUGH!" a woman behind me yelled. "GABE, HE DOESN'T HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH YOUR SISTER." I broke free from Nightplox's grip looked up and released. Coughing, my attention was drawn to this woman standing over us.

"How do you know about her? How do you know my name? How...?" the woman interrupts.

"Let me make this simple, I am Gaia, I am the soothsayer of this the Band of the Twisted Claw. You both are here because we have summoned for you, also in process of your destiny, you may find a way for the answers you both are searching for." Nightplox and I glared at each other; I pulled my blade from the ground and sheathed it. "Now I must introduce you to some people, come walk with me."

We made our way to a campfire. Gaia announced our arrival. "Twisted Claw, yet another two apprentices have found their way to our camp, they shall prepare for training first thing in the morn. Each day, the next day looks more promising." cheers filled the camp. She called over four individuals. "Nightplox, Gabe, this is Gage, Illyria, Ryder, and Skylana, they are our current guardians, may you follow in their footsteps." with some confusion I looked over to Nightplox, he did the same. We greeted them with respect. "Now I know you might be overwhelmed, I have one last person to introduce you to, and I think she will help you better understand what is going on." Gaia called over another woman, "Talia, our two new apprentices' needs to understand why they were brought here, could you tell the story of the paragons?"

"Yes, gather all who wish to hear." Talia said. As we listened to her, I felt a connection that I couldn't explain. Could this have something to do with the disappearance of my sister? I had to find out. After the story, we were instructed to choose a faction based on what we believed was the right course of action.

"Well that is easy, The Order of the Sun was right." I stated.

"How could you say that? Well actually I know why, your simple kill now ask questions later mind could say that. Nightphlox snipped. "Lunar Tribe is where I was meant to be." We went our separate ways.

"Gaia, you never answered my questions. How do you know me?"

"I knew your father, Nestaron a long time ago." Gaia replied. "It is late; I will tell you when the time is right, but for now sleep is well needed."

"No not yet, please tell me where is she? I've been searching for over 18 years, I need to know!"

"Gabe, Answers I cannot give, for life is not like that. You will find what you seek in due time for now your calling is here, your quest will bring you to your answers. That is all." More riddles, just what I needed.

---End Chapter---