

Chapter Four

The Elders of Azad

Meeting Baris and Asli and the other villagers relieved us. Although we still were not certain where Kasey was Baris and Asli appeared to indicate that their medical doctor, Irmak, had taken our friend perhaps to the village. As we walked and talked with Baris and his group he indicated the Woods of Mystery had indeed been enchanted to help keep intruders out of their villagers. What kind of introducers I had asked myself. I tried to ask Barris what was happening with them and the village but he told me not to worry about anything until we got to Azad and had the chance to speak to the elders.

We finally arrived at Azad after a long journey though the dark forest. The forest had stayed dark until we got close to the village and the closer we got the more light we saw. Baris also did confirm that the darkness of the forest was another enchantment, along with the never-ending path, to keep introducers out. Azad was unlike any other village I had ever seen. Not that I had been to many. The smallest city or town I had ever been to had a population of just a few hundred and it certain did not look like what I was seeing now.

The citizens of Azad we saw looked like their warrior counterparts save for the mask which they did not have. Their chest and pelvic regions were covered by grass, straw or any other material the people could get their hands on. Their houses were made from large limbs and sticks. Despite their appearance as I got a closer look I could tell the people's houses were quite sturdy. There were many of them with each house being extremely close to another.

As walked through the village people turned and started at Bonnie and me. Perhaps, I said to myself they had not ever seen people from the outside. At least not for many years as

Baris did indicate that they did what they could to keep foreigners and intruders out. The first part of Azad we could tell was where most of the people lived but as we continued to walk through the village we eventually came to what I would consider the business district of it.

In the business district of Azad, though the people called it ana yol or their main road, I saw many villagers selling and buying all sorts of goods and accessories from each other. There were many stores in this district. Some dealt with weapons, jewelry and other goods and some had food which quite honestly looked rather tasty. As I looked at the food I began to get hungry though I knew it was not the right time to stop and eat. I needed a distraction to get my mind off food and fortunately I found one a moment later when Bonnie and I observed two men making an exchange with one man receiving a sword and shield and the other man receiving food and some fine jewelry.

“Baris,” Bonnie began.

“What is that young one?” Baris asked.

“Alex and I could not help notice but there is no money here,” Bonnie began.

“Money. What is that?” Baris asked.

“What you spend,” I said. It did not take me but a second to realize that I had just put myself in an awkward situation. Baris had no clue what money was. I took out a dollar bill out of my pocket and showed it to him.

“What is that?” Baris asked.

“Money. This is what we spend,” Bonnie said.

“We don’t spend nothing here,” Baris said.

“You don’t,” Bonnie replied.

“No, young lady. We do not. If people need something here they trade,” Baris said.

“Trade,” Bonnie said.

“They barter,” I added.

“Barter? What is that?” Baris said.

“Trading. It means you and your neighbor agree to trade something of value. For you it might be food or jewelry and for someone else it will be something different depending on what you are wanting or needing,” I replied.

“Yes. We trade. Very good young lad,” Baris said.

“How much longer before we get to the elders?” Bonnie asked.

“The elders are up there,” Baris said as he pointed to a gigantic house in front of us. It had the appearance of the other houses and buildings that we had passed by. It too was made from sticks and limbs though it was built to be the largest house. It was also located at the end of the village which was not unlike our own city where the mayor had lived at the very edge of the city. We continued to walk toward the elder’s hut when we were stopped by one of the guards posted next to the gate that guarded the stairs that led to the elder’s house.

“Ωηερε δο ψου τηινκ ψου αρε γοινγ?” the guard asked.

“Easy my friend. They are with me,” Baris replied. “And by the way they do not know the language.”

“They don’t,” the guard replied. “This is not good. How can they help us then?”

“Be patient my friend,” Baris said. “I think there is more to these kids than meets the eye but for now we have to be patient.”

“Baris, you’re right as usual. No wonder you are the leader of the warriors,” the guard said.

“My friend, you will have your turn. For now just be patient. Good things happen to those who wait,” Baris said.

The guard acknowledged Baris and us as we began walking up the stairs to the elders. I did not know what to expect. In fact I was kind of nervous and looking at Bonnie I had no doubt she was too. She was more pale white than I had ever remembered ever seeing her. She was also quiet too which she usually became when she was nervous or frightened.

“Hey Bonnie, it will be alright,” I said as she got close to me again. “No matter what happens stay with me.”

“Will do,” Bonnie said.

After walking up a long line of stairs we finally arrived at the elders’ house. If it were not for Baris’ assurances I would not have went in-as I was that nervous-but alas Baris helped calm down both my and Bonnie’s nerves. We slowly began to enter the hut and as we did we saw several eyes turn and begin looking at us.

“This is not good,” Bonnie whimpered.

“Ωηο δαρεσ το εντερ τηε σαχρεδ πιλλαγε οφ Αζαδ?” one of the leaders said in its native tongue.

“Μψ λορδ, τηεσε κιδσ δο νοτ ψετ υνδερεστανδ τηε νατιπε τονγυε οφ ουρ πεοπλε,” Baris said.

“Then what good can these kids do for us,” screeched an elderly female. As far as I could tell she was the only woman among these tribal leaders. Still though that surprised me too. Remembering my history most of the tribes I had studied about in the past did not have any female leaders. All their leaders were always male. That meant this village was a little different though Bonnie and I already knew that. Concerning the other elders, they were all men who for

the most part appeared as though they could still go out in battle and handle their business. I still had to remember that it was a tribe after all and that meant everyone had their roles.

“Ωηψ διδ ψου βρινγ τηεμ ηερε?” shouted a third leader.

“Ωε νεεδ ωαρριορσ νοτ κιδς,” a fourth elder shouted.

“Μψ λορδς, διδ τηε προπηεχψ νοτ σαψ ιτ ωουλδ βε κιδς ωηο ωουλδ ηελπ βρινγ δ
οων τηε Ωιτχη Δοχτορ ανδ ηις φολλοωερ τηε Δεμον Λορδ,” Baris asked.

“And yet you think its going to be these kids who can do so,” the female elder asked.

“Look at them. Neither of them have seen any batter I can almost guarantee you,” the first elder said.

“And they are not dressed properly either,” the female elder said.

“My lords, all of that will be taken care of,” Baris said.

Bonnie and I dropped our jaws after hearing this. Neither of us wanted to be ‘naked’. I did not cherish the thought that the only thing I would be wearing was some leaves to cover my chest and pelvic areas and as uncomfortable as I was with that I knew Bonnie was even more so. The two of us looked at each other strangely as Baris continued to have a talk with the elders.

“You think you can train these kids,” the female leader said pointedly. “They are nothing but babies.”

“Pardon me but who are you calling babies,” I shouted.

Everyone else including Baris covered his face. The male leaders did the same. No one could believe that I had pointedly called out the female leader for taunting and mocking us without knowing who we really were. I was generally a patient person but even my patience had limits and I was running out of it.

“You dare talk to me like that boy,” the older woman said.

“Yes ma’am I do,” I said bluntly. I could hear other gasps of disbelief after my answer but I could care less.

“Yes I do,” I again said pointedly. “And my name is Alex and not boy.”

“Hmmm,” the female leader said. “Defiance I sense in you but yet I sense something else too.”

No one said anything for several moments as the female elder began to look at Bonnie. She took a quick glance at Bonnie but took a longer look at me. I was not sure why she stared me down longer than Bonnie save for the fact that I smarted off to her but some how I did not think that was it. I also did not think I was her type and that suddenly she was looking for a man. I was after all a ‘baby’ in her eyes. She continued to stare at me which while at first I was flattered actually made me uncomfortable after several minutes.

“Courage,” the female leader finally said after a long period of silence.

“What?” Baris asked.

“Courage,” the female elder replied. “You are right Baris. There is something special about this boy and girl.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“Young man, though you are just a baby to me and my fellow elders, you have more courage than you even realize,” the female elder asked.

“And what about me?” Bonnie asked.

“Ah my young lady friend. You, like the boy, have extraordinary gifts. Your gifts must be discovered by yourselves. We cannot show them. You must be the one to learn them. To discover them,” the female elder said.

“Thank you,” Bonnie said, though I could she had disappointment in her voice.

“Don’t be disappointed young lady. By the time your journey ends you will come to have a greater appreciation of what you know and can do because you did it and not because we showed you or gave you those abilities. The abilities are already inside you but before you can discover them you must first discover who you really are,” the female elder replied.

“My lords I will do what I can to help them,” Baris said.

“No Baris. Your job is still defense of your people. We need you to be there to defend the village in case the jungle warriors again attack,” the third elder said.

“Jungle warriors,” I asked.

“It’s none of your concern,” the fourth elder said.

“My lords, I beg to differ,” Baris said.

“Now that is a surprise,” the female elder said.

“Not be disrespectful to the council of elders but if we are to truly get the kids ready for what lies ahead should we not at least tell them what they are going to be facing? I mean training without knowing what you are trying to prepare for is suicide. It is like making a fire and dumping Irmak’s magical formula on it and hoping it don’t blow.”

“Indeed,” the third elder said.

“Point well taken Baris,” the first elder said. “Take the kids, get them prepared and have them get into appropriate attire and at dinner we will tell them.”

“Yes my lord,” Baris said.

“Speaking of Irmak, where is he?” the first elder said

“My lords,” one of the guards shouted as he ran to the elders. “We have a problem. It’s Irmak.”

“Irmak,” Baris said.

“No, we will handle this. Baris, you get the kids ready. We will see what is happening,” the first elder said.

“Kids, let’s go,” Baris said in such a matter that it left no room to argue. We quickly followed him as the elders began to check on the issue with Irmak.