

## CHAPTER ELEVEN: The Stick

The group started off again, but this time at a quicker pace than the day before. Sam and Glip led, both driven by a sense of urgency. Behind them trailed the other three humans, with Horis and Skoog bringing up the rear.

Skoog looked at Horis and said, “I can’t believe we get to go with them. It’s so exciting.”

“Skoog, it may not be all fun. I hope it is, but like the old prophecies say, ‘Never count on fun taking all day. Sometimes when it looks good, bad comes your way.’ ”

“Do you guys always quote corny poems?” mocked Darius.

Horis straightened his back and stuck out his chest, “Do not mock the writings of Wirt,” he said forcefully. “I wouldn’t think that one who is mentioned in the prophecies would take them so lightly.”

Darius waved them off dismissively, “Whatever.”

Sam spoke low so only Glip would hear, “I still don’t understand why you guys brought him here. This isn’t going to go well.”

“He has his place, Master Sam,” Glip replied. “There are four spoken of in the prophecies. He is one of them as much as you are. He is needed.”

Sam shook his head. “If you say so.”

After a short distance, Glip turned them onto a smaller trail that was much less worn. The path they’d been on had been wide and rutted, obviously used often by wagons and horses. This path was narrower, barely wide enough for two of them to walk side by side.

“Glip, who uses this path?” asked Sam.

“Ones like us,” said Glip.

“This particular path is a lesser-known trail through this portion of the forest. After the appearance by that woman, Fingal and Clout decided it would be best if we avoided the well-traveled roads as much as possible. Hellius may have patrols in the forest and we do not want to meet them until the time is right.” At the name of Hellius, Horis and Skoog skittered and started to draw closer together. Then, despite their shivering, they stepped apart and moved to walk on either side of Alexis. Glip continued, “It is not the easiest or quickest route, but it gets us to where we are going.”

As they continued farther into the forest, Sam became aware of a number of sounds emanating from deep within the trees. The crunching of leaves, breaking of branches and the howls of animals caused him to jump more than once.

Sunlight dappled the forest, where it could find a path through the trees. But those streams of light were becoming less common as they walked. This caused the forest to grow darker and colder. Sam noticed a low fog slowly drifting across their path, obscuring the ground. It was only ankle deep, but it slowed their progress. Determined, Sam plodded along, leading the group down the trail.

Remembering something from the prior day, Sam motioned Fenton to catch up to him. “What was so funny yesterday when Fingal was talking?” asked Sam quietly.

Fenton chuckled, “He actually said,” he made quote marks in the air, ““There are things taking place in our world that are beyond your understanding.”” He raised one eyebrow. “Are you kidding? Sounds like something out of a movie or one of those novels Alex is always reading. He might as well have said ‘There are mysterious forces at work, but no one knows where they came from. The fate of the world is in your hands. Blah blah blah.’” He shook his head. “Let’s just free Kendra and get what we need to help your dad. Then go home.”



Thirty minutes into their walk Sam walked alone in the lead. He strode ahead of the group, demanding a quick pace. Fenton took this opportunity to move alongside Glip and, looking over his shoulder to make sure they were out of earshot, he whispered, “Why did I only get this stick? It doesn’t seem fair. Do you not trust me with a sword or bow and arrow?”

Glip reached down and took the stick from Fenton. He held it out in front of him and said, “Master Fenton, you will be able to do amazing things with this *stick*. When I give this back to you, I want you to hold it down low so no one else can see it. Then I want you to say ‘Fire!’ followed quickly by ‘Out!’ He handed the stick back to Fenton.

Fenton took the stick from him, looked at it, and then looked back at Glip, clearly confused.

Glip placed his hand on Fenton’s arm and lowered it so Fenton’s body shielded the stick from Alexis, Darius and the two Grinks who were all walking behind them. He then moved to walk as close to Fenton as he could, his shoulder brushing Fenton’s elbow as they walked.

Fenton looked at the stick and whispered, “Fire!” Instantly the end of the stick burst into flame, burning brightly. Shocked, Fenton yelled, “Yeow!” followed quickly by “Out!” The flame on the end of the stick went out as fast as it had appeared.

Sam spun around, grabbing the hilt of his sword as he did, “What is it?”

Glip waved his hand dismissively, “Nothing. Master Fenton and I were just talking.”

“About wooden flashlights?” called Darius.

Fenton turned and pointed his stick at Darius and said, “I’ve had it with you!”

“Stop!” ordered Glip as he grabbed Fenton’s arm and pulled it down, pointing the stick at the ground. “Whether you like it or not, you have to all work together. Fighting among yourselves will only delay us.” Fenton and Darius kept glaring at each other. “Am I clear?” emphasized Glip. Both reluctantly nodded. “Good. Let us keep walking.” They all began walking again with Sam still in the lead.

When the group had spread back out, Glip pointed to the stick and spoke quietly to Fenton. “You must be careful. You control powerful magic. The correct control will bring much aid to you and your friends, but recklessness could lead to great harm.”

Fenton noticed the end of the stick was not scorched or even blackened. He tentatively brushed a finger across the tip. It was cool to the touch. No evidence existed that the stick had ever been burning. Fenton said, “It’s magic!”

“This world is *full* of magic,” chuckled Glip. “It appears in many forms. Remember the woman in the clearing this morning? She clearly possessed powers - and so do you. You can light this stick with a simple command. In addition, it will never burn down. Keep it with you always. I am sure we will be needing it before our journey is through.”

Fenton smiled broadly, but then grew serious. “Earlier, you said this way would take longer than our original path.” He glanced at Sam. “How much longer?”

Glip’s voice was barely audible. “Possibly an entire day.”

Fenton pulled out his watch, looked at it, then gritted his teeth as he slipped it back into his pocket. “Because of that old woman.” He dropped his head. “Because of me,” he muttered.

Close to sunset, Glip had spotted a clearing large enough for them to set up camp for the night. When he had motioned them off the path, Sam's frustration boiled over. That's when the yelling began.

"Are you kidding me!?" shouted Sam.

In the forest, it had been hard to keep track of time, so Sam had regularly asked Fenton to check his watch. And with each passing hour, Fenton could feel the tension growing in Sam. His father was getting closer to death, and yet they didn't feel any nearer to their destination. Throughout the day Sam had pushed the pace, but to no avail. Each turn in the forest path felt the same as the last. The trees blended into one continuous mass of browns and greens, and there was no end in sight. Then there had been a noticeable shift in the temperature. Fenton knew the sun had dipped below the horizon. It was at this moment that Glip had stopped their party and motioned them off the path. That was when Sam had snapped.

The rest of the group averted their gaze and walked into the clearing, clearly avoiding the confrontation. Alexis and Darius began awkwardly removing their packs and unrolling their blankets, while Horis and Skoog cowered behind Fenton as Glip faced an irate Sam.

"I was clear that my *hope* was to reach the fortress by tonight."

"HOPE?!" growled Sam. "You shouldn't have to *hope*. You should *know*. This is your world. Your forest. How could you not know how long it would take?!" He pointed down the path. "We can't stop."

"We must. And we will." He stopped and looked to the others. They had all been watching surreptitiously, but when Glip faced them, they halted what they were doing to look directly at him. "I believe that immense danger awaits us. Exhausting ourselves before we arrive would be foolish." His eyes focused on Sam. "Do not lose this passion. It will be needed soon."

Your father's life may depend on it." His eyes drilled into Sam. "But do not expend it on your friends. We all hold onto the same hope that you do. That we can rescue Kendra and save your father. Do not doubt that." Sam exhaled loudly through his nose and stalked off to unpack his bedroll.

The others swept the center of the clearing down to bare dirt to safely build a fire. At the request of Glip, everyone gathered smaller sticks to use in the building of a fire. Horis and Skoog effortlessly built a teepee-shaped cone of sticks. Underneath it they stuffed smaller twigs and dried leaves. Then they looked to Glip for help.

"Take everyone and gather logs that we can use to keep the fire going all night," he said. "Except for Fenton. I would like him to help me get the fire started."

"Ok, Glip," said Horis. With more complaining from Darius, the two Grinks led the other three into the edge of the woods and they began picking up pieces of wood to use as fuel for their fire. When they returned with their arms loaded, the fire burned strongly.

Glip motioned them over. "Just in time. We need some of those to keep it going." The five hurried over and dropped the wood next to Glip. "Please go get more," he said. "We want enough to last all night." He looked at Fenton. "Thank you, Master Fenton."

"You're welcome," said Fenton with a sly grin.

As they all headed back toward the woods, Darius mocked, "Why'd he want you to stay?"

Alexis jumped in. "Because Fenton has always been able to do things like that," she snapped. She pointed back at the fire. "Looks like he can get a fire going pretty quick." She smiled at Fenton.

*If only you knew how easy it was this time* Fenton thought to himself.

Being told off by Alexis added to Darius' foul mood. Glip sent them into the tree line multiple times to collect logs for the fire. And each time they reappeared Darius was grouching even more. By the time they gathered enough to make Glip happy, Darius' harassing of Horis and Skoog had risen unmercifully.

"You really think it's a big deal that Fenton started this fire?" He waved his arms in the air. "Ooh, he must be some great wizard."

Horis lifted his chin bravely. "Maybe he is. I didn't see you start a fire."

"You guys wouldn't know a wizard if he turned you into a dirt monkey," responded Darius. He then looked around quickly. "Wait! Did you hear that?" he said loudly. "I think it *was* a dirt monkey."

Horis and Skoog grabbed each other for protection. Darius then pointed behind them. "There goes one now!" he yelled. "No, wait! There's at least ten! Oh no...the dirt monkeys are coming!" he screamed and threw his hands into the air and started running around Horis and Skoog.

The two Grinks jumped in the air and began shrieking and crying while running around the fire, "We're going to die. They'll tear us limb from limb. It will be so horrible..." They slammed into each other headfirst and crashed to the ground, out cold.

Darius laughed, then shifted his gaze from the two unconscious Grinks to Glip, "Aren't you going to chastise me now?" Glip's lips pressed together in a tight line and he said nothing.

Darius looked at the other three, but they only glared at him.

"Young one," said Glip, "someday you will learn that no matter what you think of someone, they may still be of some value to you."

"I doubt it," responded Darius. "I'm going to bed." He lay down on his mat and turned

away from the fire.

Fenton knelt next to Horis and Skoog. “Is there something we should do?” he asked Glip.

“No,” said Glip. “They’ll be fine. They do this frequently. Get some sleep, all of you.

Tomorrow we reach the fortress. And then the path will get difficult.”

“I’m not very tired,” said Fenton. “Sam, do you mind if I look through the diary before I go to sleep? I want to check out the stuff about the fortress. Maybe there’s something in here that will help us get inside.”

“Sure,” said Sam. He reached into his pack and pulled out the diary. He handed it to Fenton. “Be careful with it.”

Glip reached out and placed a hand on the diary. “Yes, Master Fenton. Be very careful.” He paused and took a deep breath. “You do not understand how important this diary truly is. It is more than just words and pictures. There is powerful magic here, and many important prophecies that, if they were to fall into the wrong hands, could become very useful to the enemy. Read it, learn what it says, and protect it. This diary is the key to the future of Decapolis.”

Fenton reverently laid the diary on his lap and carefully untied the leather straps. He opened it and the familiar blue glow radiated from the pages.

The others stretched out on their mats and one by one drifted off to sleep. Fenton, however, stayed awake for hours, mesmerized by the writings and drawings littering the pages of Wirt’s diary. Eventually, he fell asleep, tightly clutching his magic stick in one hand and the closed diary in the other.