

## CHAPTER FIVE: Horis and Skoog

They crested the hill and saw their barn. The large structure contained enough space for them to play hide-and-seek when they were younger, but those were its better days. The old red paint only remained in a few places, the wide doors hung loosely on their hinges, and sections of the roof had given way to the weather. Small openings ran down each side of the barn—one for each horse stall. Small pieces of broken glass wedged in the frames gave evidence that they were once paned windows. The loft opened to the air; its doors having long ago fallen off.

As they neared the barn, they could see another creature lurking near the doors. This creature appeared to be a taller and thinner version of Glip.

Sam asked Glip, “Is that another Grink up there?”

“Yes,” replied Glip. “That is Skoog. He came with me, as did Horis.”

“Horis? Skoog?” said Alexis.

A clearly excited Fenton said, “I love it. You guys have the coolest names.”

Glip looked over his shoulder and smiled at Fenton. They reached the barn and Glip approached Skoog. “Greetings, Skoog,” Glip said. “Have you been waiting long?”

The taller Grink stared, wide-eyed at Sam, Fenton and Alexis. “Sure, Glip,” he said, oblivious to the question Glip had asked. He pointed at the three friends. “Is this them? Can I talk to them? I can’t believe it’s really The Warriors. Well, three of them.” He looked around excitedly, “Horis is going to be so happy to see them. It’s been such a long time.” He hopped up and down as he spoke, barely able to keep his voice below a yell.

Glip looked around and asked, “Where is Horis? Did the two of you complete your task?”

“Yep. We did it. Stuffed him in a bag. That’s what Horis said, and that’s what Skoog did. Then Horis said he had one more thing to take care of and that Skoog should guard the barn. So here I am, guarding the barn. No one has gone in...no one has gone out. Except for Horis and me, but that doesn’t count. Unless I’m supposed to guard it from everyone, including us. But what would I do if Horis tried to get in? And what would I do if *I* tried to go in. ”

“Skoog,” interrupted Glip.

“Where is Horis?” asked Skoog. “He said he had to leave a note for someone and would return with you.”

“We walked slowly,” said Glip. “He should be here by now.”

“I am,” said a voice behind Skoog.

Skoog jumped completely off the ground, “AAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHH!” He spun around in a full circle. “Who? Where?”

A third Grink, shorter than Glip and slightly heavier, walked out of the barn. “Hello. My name is Horis. And you are Sam.” He shook Sam’s hand.

Sam looked intently into Horis’ eyes. “You scared him on purpose.”

“Yeah...I guess so,” replied Horis. He smiled and turned to Skoog. “Gotcha!”

Skoog laughed. “Yes, you did! And I guarded the barn good... except from you. But I wasn’t guarding it from you, was I? So I did good, didn’t I?” Skoog lifted his shoulders proudly and stuck out his chest. “And now we’re done guarding it.” He paused. “Right?”

Horis looked up at him, “I think so. But we’ll probably have to do something else important later.” He looked expectantly at Glip.

Glip nodded at the two Grinks, “Yes.” He motioned with one arm toward the other two kids. “This is Master Fenton and Mistress Alexis. I need both of you to help protect them, especially when we reach Decapolis. Can you do that?”

Horis and Skoog both nodded enthusiastically, “Yes, Glip. We’ll take care of them.”

Up until this point, Alexis had stood quietly behind Sam and Fenton. She stepped between them and said, “Are we honestly going to some other land to help save Sam’s dad? What if something happens to us? Our parents won’t know where we are.”

Skoog stumbled backwards at the sound of her voice. “Oh, Horis. Did you hear her? The melody of her voice. It’s like...like the first bird chirping in the morning.” A cloud that had been blocking the moonlight moved, illuminating Alexis. Skoog’s voice cracked as he continued, “Her face. It’s so pure...so *beautiful*. In all of Decapolis, there is none so wondrous. If I were to die right now, I would die a happy Grink. I can’t imagine seeing anything in the next seven hundred years that would compare to her staggering beauty.”

Horis stood with his mouth hanging open while Skoog continued, “I think if I could take all the lovely things I have seen in the last three hundred years and add them together, it still wouldn’t equal the exquisiteness before me.” He looked at Horis, “Only the vision of the magnificent goddess that we experienced as children can compare to this.” He dropped to his knees as Horis did the same.

As he spoke, Alexis blushed slightly then glanced at Glip with one raised eyebrow. He smiled at her and nodded encouragingly. She looked down at Horis and Skoog as they lifted their eyes to her. “Will you two really protect me?” she asked, obviously embarrassed.

“Of course, Mistress Alexis. We would never let anything happen to any of The Warriors,” said Horis.

Alexis smiled and reached out her hands to them, “Get up. Please.” They stood as she continued, “How could anyone turn down you adorable little guys?”

Skoog swooned and fell back to the ground. Horis bashfully dropped his head and reached down to help Skoog to his feet, “Please, Mistress Alexis, refrain from additional compliments. I do not think Skoog can take much more,” he said. Together, the two Grinks bowed and Horis added, “At your service, we are.”

Fenton smiled broadly, “Wow. Grink bodyguards. This is so awesome. Are there any others here?”

“No,” said Glip. “Only the three of us. But where we are going, there are many Grinks.”

“Sorry to interrupt, but my dad is dying,” Sam interjected. “Can we please get going?”

Glip motioned toward the barn, “But of course. Shall we go to Decapolis?”

Fenton cocked his head to one side, “Decapolis is in the barn?”

“No,” said Glip. “But the portal is.”

“Portal?” asked Alexis. “We’ve never seen a portal.”

“I am sure you *have* seen the portal to Decapolis many times,” said Glip. “But you did not possess the means to open it.” As they looked at each other trying to figure out his statement, Glip walked into the barn.

Horis and Skoog followed him. As Horis walked past them, he looked at Alexis, “Don’t worry about your parents, Mistress Alexis. I left a note telling them you had gone to Decapolis with us.” With that he turned and walked into the barn.

Alexis looked at Fenton with distress in her eyes, “Wait! Horis!” she called out. “What do you mean you left a note? Horis!”