

*The Legend of Greywinds* – Book 4

# Winds of Zaria

## Chapter 1 – The Mists

**SPOILER ALERT**  
Reading this chapter will spoil  
parts of Book 3 if you haven't  
read it.

I watched intently as Serafina and Fiera climbed onto Rayn's enormous neck and slid down to where it met his shoulders. The witch presented Fiera with one of her magical chains that grew as long as was needed at any given time. Fiera flung it around Rayn's neck and once she had a grip on both ends, Serafina instructed her on how to fly with Rayn. Watching the way Fiera mastered this art so quickly gave me the impression she had done this before although I knew she had not. My companion made gliding through the sky with this colossal beast look as natural as breathing. Rayn again landed on the ledge outside the cave entrance. He lowered his head and Serafina slid down his neck to the floor of the cave.

"Healer, will you be the first to fly with me to Zaria?" asked Fiera in a tone unlike that of a Protector.

"I would be most honored, One of Fire," I responded.

I was not as graceful as Serafina when attempting to climb onto Rayn's neck. He was most patient with me. While we prepared to depart, Jenani cried out.

"What is it, dear friend?" asked Serafina.

Jenani came over to me with something in her mouth. She motioned to me to take what she had to offer. She had taken the piece of the little dragon's shell with the symbol of Fiera's dragon on it. Somehow Jenani fused it to a piece of shiny black rock, a staple in Edana. I now had the physical part to the fourth key.

"I am grateful for your gift, dear dragon," I said as I bowed my head ever so slightly. I then placed the piece in the sack with the other items representing the keys of the wind.

The others stood by as we took flight. What a strange sensation it was to be so high without solid ground underfoot. I had seen a few places from various mountaintops, but this view was much different. There was nothing blocking my sight in any direction. The shore where we first landed was visible, as was the entire Asar River. We flew above many summits including the mountaintops that were red with lava. As we made our way to the southern border, the thoughts flooding my mind were of Keara and Ulin. They were new-found friends who gave their lives to protect us. I struggled to hold back the tears.

The fiery beauty of Edana faded behind us. A sad and oppressive feeling quickly overtook me. We were now crossing high above the Assiral Plains. It mattered not in what direction I looked, this barren place was everywhere. Vayda said that Asar had destroyed over twenty clans in this part of the world. The immensity of it all was overwhelming. There was little here to validate life except a rogue plant here and there. Clusters of rock formations were scattered about, leading me to believe these may have been the remnants of hamlets long forgotten. A deep crevice ran south from the Border Mountains of Edana through the center of the plains.

Desolation. Despair. Despondency. I was not prepared for the bombardment of pain and suffering that attacked me. My friends seemed unaffected by the negative energy that surrounded me. I asked Fiera if she would allow me to hold the snowflake obsidian. Serafina told us it would ward off negativity. Even as high as we were, I could feel the overwhelming horrific impact of this place. I needed help. I held the stone, closed my eyes, and consciously began to funnel the negativity that I had absorbed into the stone. Once we reached Zaria, I would cleanse the stone and convert the negativity into positive energy releasing it into the world around us.

It took hours to cross over the Assiral Plains. *When will we reach Zaria?* I did not see Zaria at all. Before us was a large group of clouds. I thought nothing of them until Rayn began his descent. We raced downward which was quite frightening because I could see nothing but clouds. Trying to maintain my composure, I took very deep breaths, prayed continuously to the grey winds for a safe landing, and refrained from screaming to allow Fiera and Rayn to concentrate on their task. When I thought I could no longer stand it, Rayn's body began to level out a bit. I relaxed my clenched, aching jaw. We were no longer plummeting to the ground but gently floating down until the whoosh of his wings stopped and his feet softly landed in an area surrounded by a dense mist of sorts.

"Rayn says you must wait here. He insists that you do not wander from this area."

"I remember the story about Zaria and how the Mists would devour those who were not invited. I will do as Rayn asks and will not wander from this place."

"Rayn and I will return to Edana for our next passenger. Who shall be next Healer?"

"It matters not. All must come eventually. Take whoever is willing to go next. Since it will be days before everyone arrives, I will set up camp, if that is acceptable." Rayn nodded his approval. I handed the snowflake obsidian back to Fiera. "If anyone is anxious or distraught as you cross the Assiral Plains, have them hold that stone. It will rid them of whatever negativity they might absorb as they pass over that lifeless place. The cleansing will have to wait."

"How is it that I was not affected by the negativity?" asked Fiera with concern.

"I cannot say for certain. I only know that together you and Rayn emit a force that sets my skin to tingling. Perhaps you have the same effect as some of my stones. This is conjecture on my part."

"What stones?"

"Oh, stones such as malachite, black onyx, or black tourmaline. They are known for repelling negativity. I am pleased that you are not affected in any way, especially since the two of you will need to cross the Plains many times within the next few days." *Dear grey winds keep them safe*, I thought to myself as my friend and her beast of fire prepared to depart.

Fiera promised to offer her passengers the stone before leaving Edana. I said my goodbyes and watched as this marvelous beast spread his massive wings and with a spring of his forceful legs, left the ground. Within seconds they were gone from sight and the mist instantly filled the void they left behind. I set up camp and quietly sat remembering the

words used by Clar to describe her time spent in Zaria in hopes it would provide some insight into gaining access to this mystical land of faeries.

*Clar said that Caspia spoke a single word before touching the Senarefae. Suddenly they found themselves surrounded by a thick mist. Caspia told Clar to thank the mists for allowing them passage. The mists parted, and a white horse led them to... oh what did she call those orbs... wil... wil... wil-o-wisps, yes wil-o-wisps.* Once I recalled Clar's words I began speaking to myself, I suppose, since there was no one else there except me and my companion fog. *"Are all Senarafaes capable of transporting people to Zaria? Will searching for the answer make a difference considering I am already in Zaria? What word did Caspia say?"*

I wondered if the strange-looking horse on the amulet Jenani gave to Fiera was the same type of white horse that Clar remembered as a child. Again, questions with no answers.

The growling of my stomach quickly grabbed my attention away from Clar's story. It was the strangest thing. As I reached over to grab my pack, I noticed that the mist remained at arm's length to me. This fog was the only thing my eyes were privy to other than the small circle around me that was clear of any obstruction. As I walked, the circle followed. *Why had I not noticed this before? There is more to this mist,* I thought. After satisfying my hunger, I turned to meditation. That helped me to retain my sanity—there was nothing for me to occupy my time while I waited for the others. Although this untouchable captor prevented me from seeing anything, I could tell the night was forcing its way into the heavens.

As the day lost its light, the mist took on a most beautiful shimmer. Flashes of light appeared randomly throughout this glistening fog. It was mesmerizing. Then my ears detected a noise above me. The whoosh of Rayn's wings had a peculiar tone from the ground. Within seconds and without sound, the mist gave way to him as he descended. His talons held a large box-like container. As he gently placed the container on the ground, I noticed its passenger. Epinette was quietly waiting for me to let her out of her flying stall. I ran toward the opening in the box. Without thinking I wrapped my arms around her neck and held her close. It had been weeks since I left her with the Sentinels back at their post.

Rayn landed gently beside the stall and Arial and Garam slid down the dragon's neck. As long as each of us stayed within arm's length of each other, the mist encircled us as a group rather than individually. Fiera and Rayn rested until we believed the first moon was high in the sky. Then they departed for Edana once again.

Garam was giddy and whistled to every flash of light he saw. "What is he doing, Arial?" I asked the Blossom clanswoman.

"He is speaking to the lights, asking them to play with him."

"Are the lights answering him?" I questioned as my eyes darted to and from the many flashes of light above and around me.

"I do not believe so. Why do you ask, Carena?"

"There is something about this mist that eludes me."

"I don't think it is harmful. Look at Garam. He is laughing and playing and does not seem to be bothered with limited visibility."

"Let him enjoy himself while we concentrate on how to get away from this fog and find that horse from Jenani's amulet. Before your arrival, I went over all of Clar's words about her travels to Zaria. I tried thanking the mist for allowing us passage, but nothing happened."

"Perhaps the words needed to be said a certain way?"

"Perhaps, but I believe Clar was being as specific as she could possibly be under the circumstances. If it were some sort of incantation, I believe Clar would have mentioned that."

Arial and I decided to continue our discussion in the morning. The shimmer of the mist was quite intense, as was the continuous flashing of lights within this enslaving fog. It was a bit difficult to sleep but eventually all three of us succumbed to exhaustion.

The sound of Rayn approaching woke us all. The mist had taken on a grayish color for some reason. We listened intently until the mist began to part and both Fiera and Rayn were once again visible to us. This time Lexa and Jada made their way down Rayn's neck, and both of them simply stared in awe at how the mist moved around us.

"Jada, do not wander off. We will be unable to find you if you do," I said to her, hopefully before the thought of meandering about made its way into her head.

"Clar's words were quite accurate in describing this mist," remarked Lexa as she moved her arms about, watching how the mist moved with her.

"I see we have another of the horses," said Arial as she looked toward the flying stall. "Is that Rego?"

"Rego? Is that not the name of the captain of that ship who graciously took Captain Leky's passengers onboard when we travelled from Meena back to Tana?"

"Yes. You are correct, Lexa. I called this horse Rego because he is of the same temperament as the captain. He enjoys people and wants to help them. I named him before boarding Captain Najo's ship in Leha. Please excuse me. I will take him from the 'flying stall' as Carena calls it."

"There is food and water in my pack, Arial, should Rego need it."

"Thank you, Carena."

"Healer," called Fiera from atop the shoulders of her beast. "Rayn and I will return to Edana to gather the last of the horses."

"Don't let her go, Carena," yelled a concerned Jada. "There were storm swirls forming as we approached Zaria. If they leave the safety of this mist, they will be exposed with nowhere to go for cover."

The words flew from my mouth as I turned quickly to address the Protector. "Fiera, Jada is right. You cannot fly back to Edana with storm swirls ready to attack at the first opportunity."

"The longer we wait, the more time we waste," she remarked.

“Then we will do without the other horses. Jada and Lexa can ride with us. Fiera, we did not come this far to lose you to swirls. It is your choice: do without the horses or wait until the storm swirls pass. What shall it be?”

“Jada,” said Fiera between clenched teeth.

“Hello up there,” said Jada with a big grin and an excited wave of her hand.

Lexa interjected, “Fiera, it is in all our best interests that you do not leave Zaria right now.”

With an edge to her voice Fiera replied, “Very well, we will leave the other horses behind.”

Fiera climbed down Rayn’s neck and recited the words “dayaday nomentis reyacu.” The massive dragon began to change shape into the horse we all knew as Jase. Other than Arial, Garam, and me, the others had not witnessed shapeshifting. Jada was excited. Lexa was analyzing the situation. Fiera’s look was one of great concern. Once the transformation was complete Fiera rushed over to Jase examining him closely to be certain all parts were in the right places. Jada spoke to Jase to satisfy her own curiosity.

“Fiera, Jase says he is intact, and you should not worry. He also wants to thank you for returning his child. He says he is forever in your debt.”

Fiera looked directly at her long-time companion and adamantly told him he was not in her debt and if he wished to return to his family, she would release him from any commitment he felt toward her or this quest.

Jada repeated Fiera’s words to Jase. He nudged her and rubbed his head against hers. Once he stopped neighing, Jada looked at Fiera and gave her Jase’s message, “Jase says this quest is as important to his family as anyone else’s. He will see it through. He says he is and always will be connected to you, Fiera, whether you release him or not.”

Although tears filled Fiera’s eyes, she was able to keep them from rolling down her cheeks. Fiera needed a moment with Jase, so I motioned to the others to give her some privacy; as much privacy as could be afforded without losing them in the mist.

We sat together surrounded by a fog that had turned a depressing grey. It was frustrating to sit there hour after hour trying to think of a way out of this prison. The thought of being trapped in this grey fog forever was a thought I kept pushing out of my mind. The day turned into night. The mist did not take on that shimmery look as it had the night Arial and Garam arrived. The flashes of light were nowhere to be found. The storm swirls were audible, although we could not see their destructive forces. The louder the noise the greyer the mist became.

The following morning the mist was void of its ashen color, leaving behind a lighter silvery tone. Although we were still hostages of this strange fog, I no longer had the feeling of confinement. Perhaps I was growing accustomed to the mist—more likely it was just that I was with friends, which made this journey much easier. We sat there brainstorming and again spent an entire day without finding a way through the mist. Our failure to find a solution made us all a bit irritable. It took me a long time to fall asleep that night. I suspect that was the situation with the others as well.

"I did that the first day I was here," I said in response to Lexa's question. "I thanked the mist for allowing us passage. Nothing happened."

Garam whistled to Arial. "Garam wants to know how you could thank the mists for allowing all of us passage when some of us had not yet arrived in Zaria?"

"Have you considered that it may not be the words themselves, but your sincere intention that creates a connection with the mist?" asked Jada.

"Why did the mist change from that ugly grey to that lovely light silvery color? Are we ever going to get out of here?"

Jada had a way of taking your mind to another place. After a chuckle or two all went quiet.

"Jada, you may have found our answer. I remembered the words that Clar spoke and simply repeated them without thought or conviction of any sort. Since we are all here now, let me ask once again." I rose to my feet and quieted my mind. Then I spoke the words with intention. "I thank the mist for allowing us passage."

We waited. Nothing happened. "What am I doing wrong?"

"Let me try," said Fiera. She spoke the same words and still nothing happened. Fiera turned to Arial, "You try it."

Arial's attempt yielded the same results as the rest of us. Lexa could not get the mist to part either.

Jada repeated the words and again the mist did not move. Garam whistled again. "What is it, Garam?" asked Jada, smiling down at her friend.

"He keeps asking why we are all thanking only one mist," said Arial with a quizzical look on her face. "Aw, twiddles. Garam is there more than one mist?" asked Jada. Garam nodded. "Are these mists people?" she continued. Her furry friend shook his head. "What are the mists then?"

Garam giggled and whistled for nearly a minute. Arial responded to him and he whistled a bit longer.

Everyone looked at Arial in anticipation. When Garam had completed his song, Arial quietly raised her head and answered, "The Mists are people turned into faeries by Wizard Celie during the Great War. Mists are charged with protecting the inhabitants of Zaria and its borders from harm. He says the dancing lights told him."

As the rest of us stood there trying to make some sense of what Arial was saying, Jada spoke up immediately. "We thank the Mists for welcoming us to Zaria and providing us safe passage. We need to find the creature that resembles Fiera's amulet before we run out of time."

When nothing happened, Jada joined the rest of us as we attempted to devise a new plan of action.

Garam started jumping up and down. Then he began tugging on Arial's arm.

"What is it, Garam?"

He pointed, and we all turned to see what had excited him so. Before us stood a most attractive semi-transparent form that appeared to be female. She hovered above the ground

and tiny specks of light outlined her naked body. Pieces of her hair were wrapped around her body while other portions floated in the air. We stared as the color of her hair kept changing, reflecting all the shades of a rainbow.

A delicate voice broke the silence around us. "I am called Jinx. How may I be of assistance to you?" she asked as she floated before us.

"Are you made of water droplets?" questioned Jada as the rest of us stood there motionless.

Before Jada could get her next question to leave her lips, Fiera stepped in front of Jada and addressed this mesmerizing fluid form floating before us. "We seek a creature that resembles this one?" said Fiera as she removed the amulet and handed it to the Mist faerie.

"And what will you do when you find this creature?" questioned Jinx as the specks of light grew more intense.

"We are not certain," I responded.

"You seek this creature, but you know not why?" Jinx paused as she looked at each and every one of us. "What strange creatures you are. Since you were brought here by a dear friend of all who live in Zaria, the Mists have been instructed to keep you from harm, for now." Jinx flitted over to where Jase was resting. As she hovered near his face, she bent over and kissed his snout. Jase snorted. "Rayn helped to protect Zaria thousands of years ago when Asar laid siege against Yerg. The Zaria of today is much smaller than it was during the time of the great wizards," she added with a tone that made me feel she witnessed this loss herself. "If not for Rayn and the help of a wizard, Zaria would be no more. Welcome back, old friend. It has been too long."

Jinx moved away from Jase. Still floating in the air, she recited words that were quite foreign to me. Then she made an unusual gesture with her hands and the Mists began their transformations. Before us now stood a dozen or so of these lovely magical faeries.

"How did you do that? What do you eat? Do you protect the entire border between Zaria and the Assiral Plains?"

"You are quite inquisitive, dark hair." The creatures that stood before us chortled. Jinx continued, "We are the sentries of Zaria and as such spend our lifetimes protecting the border of our land from the evil let loose by Asar. We disorient and enslave intruders by creating this illusion of mist. Should we determine you are a threat to the creatures of this land, we attach ourselves to you and drain all the water from your body. This replenishes us—we require water to survive. What is left of you is an empty shell that no longer threatens the balance of life on Zaria."

Jada's head dropped a bit and a look of disgust was visible on her face.

"As you can see some of us are still in the form of a 'fog' as you so called it. Sometimes the slightest intrusion can disrupt our entire world. So, we Mists do not hesitate to end the life of intruders if necessary. We are everywhere," she said as she pointed up.

All our eyes followed her hand and the mist continued high into the sky forming a dome high above us. The light from the suns shone brightly and the dome was only visible when seen from certain angles—so strange.

“How do you make the mist do that? How is it we can see the sun and the dome? Does it ever go away?”

Jinx giggled. “Dark hair, you ask many questions.”

“I apologize. I am simply curious by nature. Questions seem to flow from me like water from a stream.”

“The dome, as you call it, protects all Zarians from the storm swirls. Recently we Mists have been unable to prevent a few of the swirls from destroying parts of our land. We do not know why. If this continues, Zaria is in danger of annihilation. Many inhabitants of Zaria are known to others on Yerg as faeries. Most of us are delicate and peaceful by nature. This part of Yerg is fragile, and imbalances in our habitat affect many different creatures here. The Mists were put in place by one of the Wizards of Peace to guard against the destruction of our lands by the Dragonhorses and their leader.”

“Do you know the wizard’s name?” asked Lexa.

“Oh yes. We have a festival each year in remembrance of Wizard Celie. None of us would be here today if it were not for her.”

Lexa smiled proudly.

“Rayn, did you and your friends come here to help us once again?” Jinx pleaded as her ice-blue eyes looked to the hot blood.

Fiera responded. My attention was still on the shapeshifter. It was still a bit strange to see her look at Jase and call him Rayn. “We are here because Yerg is in danger of total annihilation. That is why we seek this creature that you see on this amulet. We are on a quest to find seven keys and to stop the destruction of our world.”

“Do you bring magic with you to stop the swirls from attacking Zaria?” she asked me.

“I have no magic to stop the swirls, but our ability to find the last three keys is crucial to the survival of everyone in our world. Jinx, please tell me if you know of this creature that we seek.”

“Oh yes. Unicorns are plentiful in Zaria.”

“Unicorns?” asked Fiera.

“There are many?” asked Lexa.

“Please look at the amulet again and tell me if there is something unique about the one we seek,” I said, encouraging her to take a much closer look.

“There is nothing unusual about this unicorn.”

Her reply sickened me. We had wasted so much time here already as prisoners of the Mists. *Were we now looking for a specific unicorn or simply any unicorn we encountered? Was the unicorn the key or was it something the unicorn did or ate or...?* There were too many questions to consider. The Mists had released us and now we needed a viable plan of action.