

Part 1

Lira's Journey



Χηαπτερ 1

High in the mountains of Naffall the waterfall poured from a rugged cave and fell to a pool far below. The battered warrior stood beside the pool slowly removing the tattered armor. Revealing a slim Elvin maiden who then stepped into the crystal waters. The early morning light touched her pale skin as she unbound her hair, letting the raven tresses swirl around her as she cleansed her wounds in the healing water. Her emerald eyes and black hair marked her as one of the race of elves whose home was the deep forest far to the east. The battle had taken its toll on her and she knew she must heal her wounds before those that followed caught up to her, but for a time the water was cool and the healing went quickly. For a moment she let her thoughts rest.

.more in Chapter 1 but for now read all of Chapter 2

Χηαπτερ 2

It was late in the evening when she and her companions had left her homeland. The Elves slipped from the fortress into the darkness of the forest. Smoke from the burning trees filled the sky and darkened the moon, casting a dull red glow in the night. An eerie silence hung over the forest and the elves could feel the oppressive darkness that seemed to cling to them. They left the ancient fortress and rode silently through the night. The thick moss of the forest floor and the soft brown earth silenced the hoof beats of the horses. They were as ghosts drifting over the earth slipping, unheard through the dense forest. With Gailen in the lead, Lira and her companions circled wide to slip past the Dremerion lines and around their encampments. They then worked their way through the forest to the Kylos River that ran past their realm to the sea beyond. The river lay broad and calm as it neared the sea. They rode up the river keeping near the bank, riding in the shallow water near the edge; the brush and trees near the river keeping them from view. It was nearing dawn as they neared the edge of the Elvin realm. They stopped on the top of a small hill and Lira looked back. She wondered if she

would ever see her homeland again. Gailen sensed her fear and touched her arm saying, “My lady we will return, we must go now, the hour grows late!”

They followed the river west until they reached the edge of the foothills. Dawn was breaking as they turned away toward the mountains. The tiny group of Elves rode on toward the Blue Mountains, the fate of their race heavy on their hearts.

Unknown to the Elves, one of the Dremerion lookouts had seen them as they turned toward the mountains. Quickly he returned to camp and excitedly reported their departure. The Dremerion General shouted at his soldiers who were still sleeping “get up you lazy worthless slugs. I want twenty soldiers and one of the beasts to go now and find them!” He was angry that some of the Elves had escaped. “How could you let them get past you? What do you think I have lookouts for?” he raged. “Find them and kill them.” He said, fury filled his voice, and his black eyes burned into them. “Do not let them get away or it will be your heads!!” In moments the beast was on their trail. The soldiers knew it would be their death if they returned unsuccessful. General Greulof was not forgiving of failure!

The elves had ridden hard the rest of that night and the next day. They only stopped to let their mounts drink. They ate food from their packs, not stopping or making a fire. Both they and their horses now had to rest. As evening fell they had made camp at the foot of the Blue Mountains. They found a sheltered place at the edge of a ravine hidden by tall trees. A spring ran down the ravine for water and the trees offered shelter for the night. Gailen said, “This looks like a safe place to rest. I know it is dangerous but we have no choice, the horses can go no farther without resting.” They dismounted and made a small fire behind a large boulder. Taking some dry food and fruit from their small packs they ate their evening meal. It felt good to have some warm tea and some food in their stomachs. The horses

grazed on the rich grass, happy to rest for a time. The group then wrapped themselves in their cloaks and tried to sleep, one of the elves keeping watch.

Gailen approached Lira and said gently, “My lady, you must try to sleep, the journey is still long ahead.” “Yes, you are right.” She replied, “But wake me soon. We must not stay long; as soon as the horses have rested we must go on.” Lira, dressed like a warrior, wrapped herself in her cloak and lay down to sleep hidden behind the bolder near a large fallen tree. She was tired and knew she needed to rest.

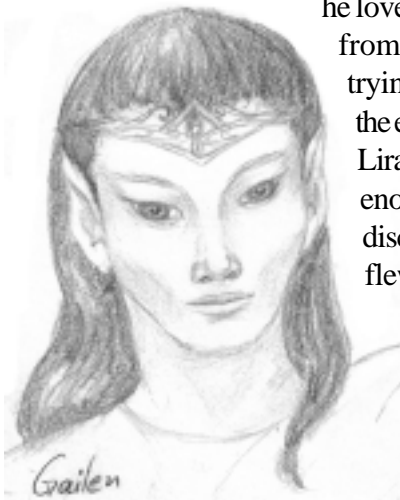
Soon she drifted off to sleep. The night was quiet, only the sound of crickets and the soft gurgling of the nearby stream. The wind blew softly bringing the scent of the trees; a sweet aroma of moss and cedar surrounded them.

The Dremerion that had been tracking them came upon their camp just before dawn. The lookout called out a warning as they attacked. The beast leapt, growling, slaughtering most of the horses to block their escape. The sound of screaming horses woke Lira; she jumped to her feet sword in hand. The stench of the beast filled her nostrils. She saw the beast slashing and tearing at the horses! They screamed and ran trying to get away but the beast was too quick. One of the horses lay on the ground disemboweled. Another fought to get away blood pouring from his shredded flesh, when once more the beast’s claws flashed and stilled his cries. Lira was sickened at the sight of the poor animals trying hopelessly to escape.

Only Lira’s horse escaped the slaughter unscathed. She and her companions fought for their lives, but they were far outnumbered and their efforts were futile. Their slender swords were no match for the huge curved falchions of the enemy. Still they fought on. The elves were quick and agile, so were able to avoid the blades for a time. They were too few to last long in a battle so

one sided. The Elves knew the battle would be over quickly. Stunned by a blow to her head, Lira fell to the ground. She stumbled to her feet as Gailen grabbed her arm pushing her behind him toward the fallen tree near the ravine. After the tracking beast had destroyed three of the horses it turned on the elves. Gailen said “Run my lady they have not seen who you are; go quickly I will hide you from view.” He stood in front of her, sword in hand fighting; and gave his life so she could slip away in the early morning darkness.

Gailen fought as one possessed; he was not only fighting for the one



he loved, but for his entire race. He leapt from rock to rock shooting his bow trying to avoid the slashing falcons of the enemy, drawing the fight away from Lira's escape. If he could hold out long enough it would be dawn before they discovered that she had gone. Sparks flew in the darkness as heavy blades met with stone. The light blades could not penetrate the heavy armor of the Dremerion and arrows bounced off their shields. Only a few found seams and raised howls of pain

and rage. Out of arrows, Gailen leapt onto the back of one of the enemy and slashed his throat with his dagger. Rolling off onto his feet, he fought on with his slim sword, twisting, turning and leaping. Suddenly a heavy falchion came crashing down on his shoulder; Stunned, he cried out in pain as his blade fell to the earth. The end would come soon as the enemy raised his deadly blade again. With his dying breath Gailen prayed for Lira's safe escape.

Her companions had hidden her escape, she could hear them fighting and dying so she might live to finish the journey. With the sound of metal against bone and the growling of the beast, the screaming of the horses still ringing in her ears she slipped away

trembling. Leading her horse she crept quietly up the mossy ravine. The wind was at her back concealing her scent from the enemy. She had ridden the rest of the morning, slowly making her way up the rugged mountain. Staying hidden in the trees and avoiding any trails until she had reached the pool high in the mountains. Now she must continue her quest alone. She choked back her tears at the sacrifice that had been made for her.