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LICH KING

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CHAPTER 9

Prisoners of War

Jagar pulled himself up the ladder, out of the Lake of Life and onto the docks. A thick layer of smoke poured off of various fires that burned in the city around and above them. The murky grey mist hung like a thick wool blanket over the lake, obscuring the waters below.

Jagar's hardened leather chest plate glistened as water drained through the intricate patterns fashioned into it, and dripped onto the wooden beams at his feet. He pounded a fist into his chest, water splashed into the air. He burped and spat some lake water onto the dock.

"Woof. Now, *that* was a ride!"

He started to shake himself off when Kinnara ran up to him and shoved him in the chest.

"Llochynnoch! You pushed me into the water!"

Jagar watched her as she bounced off his chest. "Yes."

The Swift smiled. "See. I'm not the only one who thinks you're a rangaar. Ranknar? Rankgaar."

Jagar scowled.

"You maniac! It was all I could do to keep from drowning."

Jagar didn't budge. "But you didn't, and now we're all together again."

Kinnara hit him again. "That's not the point!"

"Isn't it? You're alive." Jagar pointed at Dewa. "And so is she, at least for now."

The Swift slid between Jagar and Kinnara. "Now just a moment—"

"And you!" Kinnara turned her ire toward The Swift. "You… you're…human?"

The Swift smirked. "Well…it's complicated."

Kinnara squinted. "What does that mean? Either you are human, or you aren't."

Dewa approached behind Kinnara. "If you are a human, how is it that you were you an elf in the barn?"

Kinnara perked up. "Wait. You're a shifter, aren't you?" She paused. "And I'll bet my father's hunting bow that you are the one who was chased out of princess Twyllea's bedroom window yesterday." She squinted at The Swift.

"Bedroom window?" Jagar tilted his head. "You said you were here for a princess, but you never said anything about any bedroom window."

The Swift shrugged and motioned his hands up and down his body. Jagar rolled his eyes. "Well technically, I jumped out of the window on my own. There wasn't any chasing involved until later."

"And then smashed through the crystal roof and into the bedroom of one of the deans of the college." Dewa drew her sword and pointed it at The Swift. "Tell me, human, why I should not administer the king's justice right now."

Jagar grabbed the blade, lifting it. "Hold, elf. We have more important things to worry about right now. We don't even know if this princess of yours is still alive."

Dewa gasped. "You dare!"

Jagar squared up at Dewa and glared down at her. "Don't forget why we're here." He pushed Dewa's sword out of the way, forcing her to stumble to one side. He ignored the fresh blood that dripped out of a cut on his hand from where he had been holding the blade.

Dewa recovered and leaned into a defensive stance. "Virtue necessitates that I never strike an unarmed opponent, but if you insult the royal family again, I will not be held responsible for my

actions."

Kinnara stepped between the quarreling teammates. "Quiet! There's something going on in the main market square."

Jagar turned his back to Dewa and faced the market. "Show me."

Dewa turned and glared at The Swift. "Don't go far. My father is going to be very interested in meeting you."

The Swift sighed and glanced away. "So I've heard."

"Keep it down." Kinnara looked at the rest of the team. "All of you." She pointed to the sky where several large winged creatures circled the market square. "Over there. Some activity just started. There is a lot of noise, sounds like a crowd of people, and then those flying beasts just arrived. The prisoners might be there, or if not, they will soon. Maybe they are planning to load them onto ships to sell or trade."

The Swift motioned to a group of buildings off to the side. "I've spent a lot of time in this area. We can get a good view of the market from the top of those warehouses over there. Follow, me."

The Swift led Jagar and the two elves behind the warehouse buildings. "There will be a way to get up to the roof from inside."

He crept underneath a window. "Hey, big man. Hoist me up. I'll get in and open that door over there."

Jagar looked at The Swift, then at the window, then at the door. He tilted his head.

The Swift waved to him. "Come on, hurry. We can get in this way."

Jagar ignored his partner and started walking toward the door on the side of the building.

The Swift put his hands on his hips. "Hey, raankgar! Where are you going?"

Jagar walked up to the main warehouse door, turned the handle. Unlocked, it opened without any resistance.

Jagar shrugged. "People don't usually take the time to lockup when they are running away from an invading army."

He stepped into find a vast, open room, filled with well organized rows of various sized crates, boxes, and random loose items.

"Hmmm. This is odd."

"What is it?" The rest of the team walked in behind him.

Jagar scanned the warehouse. "It looks like everything is here

and untouched."

The Swift shrugged. "Yeah, and? Maybe they just haven't gotten here yet."

Jagar scrunched up his face. "In the outer city, did you see anyone raiding?"

Dewa scoffed. "Of course, orc. That's why we're here."

"No. They kidnapped and burned. They didn't loot and raid. Did you see anyone taking anything? Anyone at all?"

Dewa rolled her eyes. "They were probably too busy, oh, I don't know, invading our city?"

Jagar shook his head. "There's always someone taking something, even in the middle of a battle. No. They were intentionally not bothering to taking anything."

Kinnara looked up. "Or, maybe they don't care."

Jagar grimaced. "Then how are they handling their food, repairs, medicine? An army needs supplies, lots of them. Why don't they want all of this? Why don't they *need* all of this? Any invading army would empty these warehouses before assaulting the main city. They'd be fools not to."

The Swift motioned to the other end of the warehouse. "Maybe we can find out when we go look at what's happening. There's a ladder to the roof over there."

The four teammates moved quickly to the back of the warehouse. They saw no friendly nor enemy soldiers, no bodies, nor any refugees hiding behind boxes. Other than the stacks of crates and supplies, they found nothing to indicate that anyone had been in the building at all.

Jagar climbed halfway up the ladder, and then scanned the warehouse. "This is really weird."

Dewa poked at him with the hilt of her sword. "Just go, orc."

Jagar scowled, and continued up to the exit hatch. As he climbed out, he saw The Swift crouched behind a parapet at one corner of the rooftop. He waved to Jagar and the elves.

"Over here. There's a big group gathering in the open market."

As they approached the corner, they looked out over the city. Dewa and Kinnara gasped. The destruction of the city of the twin lakes was laid out in front of them. Dewa held a hand to her mouth. "Dynpat—" Her voice trailed off, barely perceptible.

When she and Kinnara had left the city, just a few hours before, the streets were a torrent of activity. To anyone watching,

it would have seemed like the elf defenders were holding their own in the fight against the invading army, if not winning. Archers rained arrows down on the armored dvergr warriors, while skilled soldiers met the enemy at choke points to stall the advance. It was a sensible strategy, and should have resulted in nothing less than a stalemate that lasted for days, while inflicting terrible casualties on the invading forces. That's why the lower district was designed the way they it was, after all. Not just to serve a practical purpose for the trading and marketing services of the city, but in a time of emergency, to clog up any invasion, to allow the substantial garrison that protected the city to batter them with artillery and missile fire, until reinforcements could arrive and overwhelm the enemy.

What they saw in front of them, however, was the complete devastation of the defenses in a matter of hours. The walls that used to separate the three major districts had been breached in several places, and for large sections there were no walls left at all. Much of the marketing district was on fire, and several of the larger buildings of the upper district, those that were constructed from stone and not wood, had collapsed.

The large, open square that usually served as the daily trading grounds was now filled with a crowd of people who all looked some combination of terrified and confused. Guards with spears and hammers gathered the refugees into a disorganized group.

"Are those survivors?" Kinnara focused on the crowd.

The Swift pointed. "I see several different types of people in the biggest group, there. Mostly elves in that smaller bunch over there."

Dewa drew her sword. "Those guards with spears are orcs! I knew you were one of them."

Jagar stepped back his hands up. "Now wait—"

"Where is my cousin?" Dewa lunged at Jagar, who sidestepped the attack. She spun around faster than he could, and faced his back. Enraged, she leapt forward, her sword straight ahead, pointed at a turning but exposed and vulnerable Jagar. A loud clang rang out as her blade was parried down to the rooftop. Dewa looked up to see Kinnara standing between her and a very shocked orc. She stared fire at her partner. "You dare—"

"Look!" Kinnara pointed at the marketplace. "There are elves, city guard, also working with the cyrach."

"Impossible." Dewa turned her attention, and sword toward Kinnara.

"Look for yourself, Dewa." Kinnara pleaded.

"It's true." The Swift leaned forward over the side of the warehouse. "There are elves, still dressed in their armor, herding the prisoners together. But look, that one doesn't have an arm. And that one has a big gash on his face."

Dewa, and Kinnara all turned their attention back to the marketplace grounds.

"You're right." Kinnara whispered. "It looks like many of the guards, elf and orc, they all have some sort of serious injury, while the cyrach do not. At least most of them don't."

The Swift stepped back and stared down. "It's like in the woods." His eyes darted back and forth.

Dewa and Kinnara looked at him. "What do you mean? What happened in the woods?"

"I killed a dvergr. But it didn't stay dead." Everyone turned toward Jagar behind them.

Dewa snorted. "Of course. You just didn't finish the job."

Jagar smirked. "Oh, it was dead. I can assure you of that."

"There's more." The Swift's face turned pale. "It attacked me."

Dewa twisted her face. "The dead cyrach?"

"No. Yes. Maybe?" The Swift stammered, shifting his weight.

"Fools, both of them." Dewa grimaced. "We never should have—"

Jagar stepped forward. "It tried to possess him."

"It what?" Kinnara gasped.

"I cut it in half." He stared at Dewa. "It was dead. Then, like with the others of these dvergr I've killed, it released a rush of some purple energy."

Kinnara's eyes bounced. "We did see quite a bit of some purple magic energy in the attack."

"Necrotic."

"What?"

The Swift continued to shift. “That purple. It’s necrotic energy. Take life energy and add the negative prefix. It turns the energy purple.” He stared at the ground.

The spirit inside the dvergr,” Jagar continued, “it tired to possess him before flying off somewhere—”

“That’s absurd.” Dewa scoffed.

“Wait.” Jagar held up a hand. “It gets worse. Something, which I only now assume was a necromancer, waved its little wand and the dvergr just stood right back up. The split torso fused back together, and off it went, presumably to come here. That was maybe an hour, or so before we met the two of you in the barn.”

“Come Kinnara, we don’t have to listen to this. If any of that were true, why didn’t this *necromancer* just kill you? You see, Kinnara, this is a waste of time.”

Kinnara looked puzzled. She turned her attention back to the marketplace. “Maybe.”

A blast of fire shot through the crowd and hit one of the guards.

“The princess!” The Swift pointed, an excited smile on his face. Another blast struck out. “And look, there’s someone fighting with her. It looks like an orc.”

“Mey!” Jagar leaned out over the wall.

The Swift looked back and forth from Jagar to the action in the market below. “That’s your daughter, Mey? She’s fighting with the princess?” He turned to Dewa. “See, I told you he’s with us.”

Jagar closed his eyes and took in a deep breath. His blood tingled and became warm as he activated Fury energy that lay dormant inside him. Another breath, and his body began to heat up as the energy resonated and continued to build. Buried inside every orc, Fury only needs to be awakened to flow out and fill their blood with rage infused energy. It amplifies their natural abilities a hundred fold, but in turn strips away most of their ability to think or reason. In a few short breaths, Jagar had transformed himself from being a very large, very dangerous fighter and turned into a killing machine that excels at destroying where points itself. He let out a howl that echoed off the buildings

around them. The Swift and elves doubled over, covering their ears. Jagar then leapt off of the warehouse roof and crashed into a group of dvergr warriors in the marketplace square.



THANK YOU!



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