

PROLOGUE

Bergle stacked the last of the fire wood under the eaves of the hut and wiped the sweat from his forehead. He turned to see his pet warthog, Cockel, playing among the flowers growing along the side of the house. He felt pride in the fact that he had planted those flowers himself. Bergle liked flowers because they made the place look pretty. He found it difficult to plant the bulb flowers though because of his large cumbersome hands.

Bergle knew his kin would find it silly to like flowers since Giants had no use for them. But Bergle wasn't like the other giants. Bergle had become more attuned to the world around him and learned to appreciate such things as flowers and bees. He had even learned to speak with the nature spirits or at least decipher their moods and body movements. He hadn't ever had a real conversation with one.

Bergle also liked helping others in need especially small creatures which compared to him includes almost everyone. Bergle's way of thinking caused him to live alone, far away from his clan. His clansmen were viscous war mongers who fought amongst themselves. They also continuously preyed on the human villages below the Cleffline.

Bergle became relatively mellow compared to his kin ever since he made friends with an Alfar hunter several years ago. Now he lived here alone with Cockel. Sometimes he missed companionship and someone to talk to other than a warthog.

The sound of his own stomach gurgling and the location of the sun centered high in the sky, indicated to Bergle it must be dinner time. He started across the yard toward the large door of his house with Cockel running and squealing after him. Bergle built his house himself. Half of the house he dug into the hillside. The other half Bergle constructed with beams and logs which he made from dead or dying trees. He even had an eave that hung over the front

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entrance so that he could sit outside without sitting in the sun or rain.

Bergle's front yard opened up to a wide field where he grew vegetables and grains for bread. He recently planted some new fruit trees that had yet to bear fruit. What he lacked from growing or hunting, Bergle traded firewood for. He still wasn't very good at cooking and often times even Cockel refused to eat the food he prepared. This didn't deter Bergle from continuing to try new recipes. He also experimented with various types of vegetables and fruits.

Up top and along either side of the house were trees of every sort that crawled their way up the mountainside. Bergle's house sat at the foothills of the Black Mountains and just shy of Goblin country. Of course Bergle wasn't afraid of Goblins. No one had seen a goblin for a long time and he felt there wasn't much of a threat.

Though Bergle descended from the great Frost Giants he himself would be considered small compared to his brethren. If Bergle had any sort of a reputation as being fearsome it grew from the mere fact of his heritage as a Giant. His true disposition would speak otherwise of him.

Inside Bergle's house to the right he had a fireplace set into a mud wall which he created with a high mud chimney. Next to that stood a large table where Bergle could prepare meals and set a basin of water for washing. Above the table he had cut shelves into the dirt wall. The rest of the room had a table with two chairs with the hope someone would join him for dinner. He also had a large lounging chair set beside the stove and sometimes he even fell asleep in it with Cockel lying at his feet.

A side room divided off on the left as pantry space for dry goods and other staples. Another room on the right of the house had a curtain across to divide his bedroom. Bergle's bedroom had space enough to fit a large bed big enough for a giant to crawl up into and nothing more.

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Bergle made most of the furniture himself. The house might seem rustic and even crude to some people but to Berge it was home. He found satisfaction in putting it all together himself. Cockel didn't care either way as long as Bergle fed him and scratched him behind the ears from time to time. He also required a warm place to sleep in the winter.

Bergle sat and ate his dinner while thought about what he should do next for the day. Winter would be here soon and he needed to be sure he had enough supplies to last him. He had plenty of staples in the form of flour and cornmeal, which he had traded for, but he needed more meat to dry. Maybe later he would go upstream to fish. Dry, salted fish would last a long time.

As Bergle thought about fish recipes, the ground rumbled unexpectedly. The earth shook beneath his feet. Cockel ran squealing to the bedroom and belly crawled under the bed, his hooves gouging the floor. Bergle just sat and waited until it passed. Feeling the ground shake didn't frighten Bergle. As a child growing up in the Cleffline the ground shook often when ice started breaking and moving off the glaciers. It would reverberate through the caverns where the Giants lived. This however, seemed odd to Bergle for he had never felt the ground shake here before.

This could be a sign that the dragons were beginning to awaken. Why the dragons chose now to awaken from the deep sleep he wasn't sure but he did know that no good would come of this. He had heard tales from the old ones of the wars and battles waged with the dragons and how bloody and savage they had been. If the Dragons came back the Giants would surely wage war upon them again.

Throughout history, an effort had been made by the Giants and humans to wipe out the existence of Dragons from all Authora. Very much like the Alfar had done to the Arachne, or at least they thought they had. Bergle thought of Elsie and her story of a giant spider chasing after her through the woods.

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More than likely she had a good bump on the head and dreamed or imagined it. On the other hand, if there are still Arachne around and the dragons awaken then war would arise. It would do no good to dwell upon such things though. So instead he thought of Elsie and wondered how she fared.

He hoped she remained safe in the little village of Ni where he had left her with Bains and Sams. He wondered if she ever got her memories back. She seemed like such a sweet but lost little girl. If the bad times came to Authora, Bergle would have to go find out what became of the little woman-child. He couldn't stand the thought of something bad happening to her.

Oddly enough, Bergle felt protective of Elsie like a father would. Bergle knew when he saw her last that there seemed something special about her and that perhaps he would see her again. Bergle decided he would go see her in the spring. He would make a special trip to Ni just for her. Getting up from the table he called to Cockel who timidly came out from under the bed.

"It's time to go fishing," he called to the warthog.

As he walked outside heading to the opposite side of the yard toward the stream he heard a commotion of birds in the distance to the west. Looking over he saw a figure coming over the hill. He knew that figure even if it were a hundred miles away; it had to be his Alfarian friend, Feldorin. Now he would have twice as much fish for his pantry. A smile spread across his face as he headed out to meet him.

"Greetings, good friend," said Feldorin. He reached his hand out to Bergle.

"Greetings to you, good friend," said Bergle.

They grasped arm to arm with hand to elbow in the ancient way of a friendly greeting. It had become a custom of the two to do so since they met though quite a stretch for Feldorin because of Bergle's size. Cockel came running out to greet Feldorin as well making happy grunting sounds while Feldorin scratched him behind the ears.

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“I see you’re off to fish, can I join you?” asked Feldorin, pointing to Bergle’s tackle and pole.

“I would be glad to have the company,” said Bergle.

They walked in silence toward the stream, Cockel dashing around like a puppy back and forth. Sometimes he would dodge between them and under Bergle’s legs. They arrived on the shore of the stream which branched off from a river that ran down from the mountain. Bergle sat down on his favorite rock which jutted out over the water. He placed a worm on his hook and cast his line in a calm spot off from the running water.

Feldorin stood beside Bergle and took out one of his arrows and tied a string to one end and then tied the other end of the string to his bow. He then waited calm and still, gazing into the water for a moment before he drew his arrow and let it fly. The arrow soared through the air a moment and then into the water without even a splash. Feldorin pulled the string wrapping it around his arm as he did until he had his arrow back with a large silver trout wiggling on the tip.

“I am always amazed at how you can see the fish and catch them so quick,” said Bergle.

Just as he said that Bergle felt a tug on his line. He gave it a gentle tug setting the hook and then reeled in his catch to find another trout slightly larger on the end of his hook. Bergle took both fish and put them on a stringer and then the two of them began again. They did this for a while not saying much except to comment on each other’s fish.

After some time Feldorin sat beside Bergle and they relaxed in the afternoon sun. Across the stream stood the forest with tall swaying trees that started thin and grew thicker as they progressed up the mountain. Something drew both their attention to one particular tree which stood apart from the others much closer to the water. Before their eyes a woman stepped abruptly out from the tree.

She didn’t step from behind the tree but came out from within the tree materializing before their eyes. Thick auburn tresses with

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golden flecks hung down over a gown the color of bright green moss. The train of her gown flowed behind her and seemed to fuse with the forest floor. She smiled and waved at Bergle and Feldorin before walking toward them.

An entourage of small birds, butterflies and bees fluttered about her and when she came to the stream, stones rose above the water creating steps for her to walk upon. As she walked across the water fish sprang up from the stream jumping to and fro about her feet. Bergle and Feldorin sat in wonder.

When she reached the shoreline which abruptly ended at the foot of a small loess, she raised her arms up to Bergle. From atop his perch on the rock above, Bergle reached down with ease and lifted the lady to them. As he set her down he stared into her eyes and watched them change from brown to gold, to green in a matter of seconds. His heart felt light when she smiled at him and he sensed that somehow he knew her. Feldorin stood up with fluid grace and bowed to her.

“My lady,” said Feldorin. “You honor us with your presence.”

“My lady,” said Bergle. Taking his cue from Feldorin he too stood and bowed slightly.

“Oh, Bergle, my sweet giant, don’t be so shy in front of me. You are well acquainted with my kind,” she said.

“Your kind, my lady?” asked Bergle.

“She is a tree spirit,” said Feldorin.

“Oh, yes of course. But I’ve never seen any of you so close up,” said Bergle.

“No, we don’t usually transform,” she said.

“Would you have a name, my lady?” asked Feldorin.

“I cannot give you my true name or it would give you power over me. Besides, even in the Alfar tongue I doubt you would be able to pronounce it,” she said.

“Then we must give you a name,” he said.

“Bergle can name me,” she said turning to Bergle.

“You’re the tree that has flowers that smell so pretty the bees are always buzzing around you,” said Bergle.

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“Yes, it’s true my flowers are fragrant and my fruit is sweet. The bees love to make their homes among my branches,” she said laughing.

Her laugh made Bergle think of a little silver bell jingling. He thought a moment trying to find the words or name that reminded him of her beauty in this form and her tree form. He knew there were other trees like her but he felt that each had their own spirit and therefore she needed to have her own name. Thinking of the things the lady reminded him of like bees, bells and beauty, Bergle tried to put the words together until they formed in his head.

“I would like to name you Debbeebell,” said Bergle at last.

“Debbeebell,” she said. The sound of her name came out like a song on the air that the birds chirped along with while the insects buzzed along in harmony.

“My Lady Debbeebell, your name is like music on the wind,” said Feldorin.

Debbeebell laughed for an instant her face aglow with the sunlight. Then a cloud crossed the sun and a shadow fell over her rosy cheeks and she became serious. Turning back she looked at Bergle and then Feldorin.

“My time in this form is brief and I cannot tarry. I have a message I must deliver,” she said.

“A message from whom?” asked Bergle.

“My roots run deep and connect to my sisters. In this connection we can communicate all over the land. My message comes from within Authora itself. Elsindai has returned and will awaken the dragons. She will need friends like you, Bergle, who have found her and saved her. And you, Feldorin, whom she has not yet met but needs. She’ll your kindness as well as your kind to show your race that she is the one to lead them,” she said.

“You speak riddles, mylady, and I’m not sure I understand,” said Bergle.

“You will sweet giant. Both of you must travel east where the great vines wrap the mortar up from the ground and meet the river goddess as she turns. This is the place where the first dragon made

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his oath to the heir. In that place you will stand with her,” said Debbiebell. She turned to leave but Feldorin caught her hand in a gentle grasp.

“Must you go so soon? You’ve only just got here?” he asked.

“I’m sorry, the magic is weak, and the witch drains much for herself from Authora, leaving the spirits drained. If she is not defeated and she stays, all the Fae will lose their powers and fade into Authora,” she said.

“No more tree spirits?” asked Bergle.

“No,” she said.

“Then we will do what we can to stop this from happening,” said Feldorin.

Then Debbiebell turned and Bergle lifted her and set her back down upon the shoreline once again. Both he and Feldorin watched as she left the same way she came, with birds and bees flying after her. She crossed the stream and as she did the stones receded back down into the water. Her gown trailed into the woods and melted into the moss and grasses as she too melted back into the tree.

The cloud passed away from the sun and rays of the afternoon sunlight filtered down through the leaves. The branches of the tree creaked and moaned as a breeze blew across the boughs. A trail of gold and red leaves swirled around the tree then flew in a straight line toward the east. Bergle and Feldorin watched transfixed a moment or two staring after the leaves as they floated off on the wind. Then Bergle looked at Feldorin.

“Did you understand any of that, my friend?” he asked.

“A little,” said Feldorin.

“What part?” asked Bergle.

“The part where Elsindai has returned and she needs our help so we have to go to Easa,” said Feldorin.

“Oh,” said Bergle.

They stood there in silence for a few minutes taking in the moment and what had just transpired. Bergle had dealt with tree spirits for many years now but never on such a personal level. He

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felt very pleased she came to him for help. Of course he thought Feldorin must be used to that sort of thing being an Alfar.

Bergle thought about his little house here at the foot of the mountains and how happy he is with his life. He went over in his mind the list of things he planned to do in preparation for the winter. He thought about Elsie and what she might be doing at this very moment. Then Bergle decided that none of these things would matter if the Spider Witch ruled Authora and took away all the magic from the Fae. Everything in his world would change and not for the good. Finally Bergle turned to his friend Feldorin who had been waiting patiently for Bergle to understand all that he already knew.

“Well, I guess we better start packing,” said Bergle.

“Sure Bergle. We’ll salt the fish first so we can take it with us,” said Feldorin.

Bergle nodded and the two grabbed their things and headed for the cabin with Cockel chasing after them. Across the stream the Debbeebell tree spirit whispered to her sisters down along the roots of the tree. Through the ground and all along Authora the message went out, help is coming.