



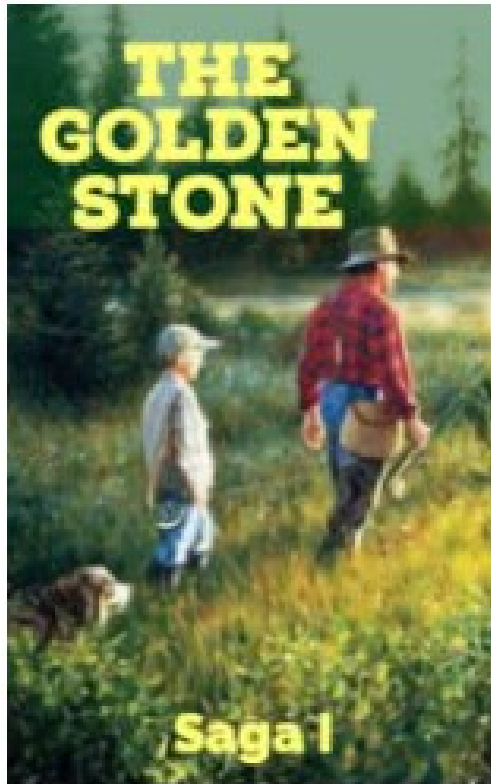
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**Adapted and modified by
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The Golden Stone Saga I

By Jenny Dooley

CHAPTER ONE

The Snowstorm

William Goldstone was not the most sociable boy. He never seemed to have as many friends as the other children in his school, and as he wasn't really keen on sport, he spent most of his spare time watching videos and playing with his electronic games.

His parents had decided to leave him with his grandfather for a week. As Grandfather Howard lived in a mountain cabin, they thought that William might find interest in the countryside, rather than watching more TV. So Howard had taken him on several walks through the forest, and the two of them had spent many hours fishing in a nearby river where William managed to catch a few fish.

Snow had been falling for the past two days, and Howard helped his grandson build a family of snowmen. They were rather small because there hadn't been much snow. However, they would soon see a lot more.

"Grandfather!"

"What is it, William?"

"What time will they get here?"

"Well, if they left on time, I'd say around seven o'clock. Mind you, the weather has become much worse..."

"How can it be 'worse'? I think it's great! Anyway, I thought you liked the snow."

"Of course I do. Though not as much as I did when I was your age."

"Do you want to go outside and build another snowman?"

"Not right now. And neither do you. It'll be getting dark soon, and a lot colder as well."

"But I'm leaving tomorrow, and we never see snow like this at home. Can't I build just one more?"

"I'll tell you what. When your parents arrive, I'll suggest that you all stay here for the night. Then you can build your snowman in the morning when the snow has settled."

"Great! With all the snow that's falling now, it'll be ten times as big as the others!"

"So what do you want to do in the meantime, William?"

"Let's see what's on TV!"

William turned on the TV and began watching one of his favourite series, while Howard stared out into the night, worried that his daughter and her husband might be caught in the snowstorm. All of a sudden, the TV picture disappeared and the lamplight faded, leaving the roaring log fire to continue making shadows by itself.

William was very disappointed.

"Oh no! It was just getting to the most exciting part!"

"It must be a power failure."

Howard tried turning on some of the light switches and changing some fuses, but with no success.

"Yes, the electricity's out completely. I think we can blame the snow for that."

"So what do we do now?"

"How about if I read you a story?"

"Huh! Boredom City."

"How can you say that when you don't even know what it's all about? Have today's children given up on books completely?"

William wasn't exactly thrilled by the idea, but he couldn't think of another.

"Okay, what is it about?"

"Oh, it's a wonderful story, full of danger and adventure..."

"Is there a really evil villain?"

"The most evil one."

"And the hero? There's got to be a hero. Is he brave? Is he strong?"

"Like no other man!"

Howard, now happy and a little excited, went to his bookcase and produced a large, leather-bound book. On the cover was a symbol: a crescent moon, with a tiny circle of gold sparkling near the moon's lower point. The old man blew what looked like half an inch of dust from the top of the book's pages.

"I've not read this for years."

William and Howard sat before the fireplace.

"What's the hero's name, Grandfather?"

"A very familiar one - you'll recognise it straight away. Now... the story begins on a peaceful day, in a peaceful village set deep within a distant, forgotten land."

Howard opened the book and turned to the first page.

"Our hero, who at this time is a boy of about your age, is returning home with his father after a week of hunting..."

CHAPTER TWO

Savage Visitors

"Come along, Will."

Adam Goldstone's face glowed with pride as he led his son out of the forest and down towards their village in the valley. Young Will was very excited.

"Just wait till Mother sees what I've caught!"

"Hmm, seven rabbits..."

"And the pheasant!"

"Of course, the pheasant. Together with the deer around my shoulders, the animals in your sack will feed us for quite some time."

"Are you proud of me, Father?"

Adam stopped walking, turned to face Will and placed a hand on his son's shoulder.

"Always."

When they reached the village, Adam noticed something strange. There were more horses around than usual, and there was a lot of noise coming from the tavern where his wife worked. Just then, Adam saw his wife walking towards the tavern, her arms full of vegetables.

"Why the extra supplies, Liana?"

"Darling! You're back!"

She put her load to one side, kissed her husband, then knelt down and held Will's face between her hands.

"And you, my little man... have you been learning well?"

"Have a look in my sack!"

"Oh my! I've never seen so many rabbits!"

Will's parents began whispering so as not to worry him. "Liana, what about my question?"

"We have visitors, Adam."

"I guessed as much. But who are they?"

"King Ddraig and his men."

Adam was surprised and angry.

"What are they doing here?"

"They're on their way home from a battle..."

"Which, no doubt, they won."

"Of course."

"Pity."

Few people liked King Ddraig. Those who did were sitting with him in the tavern. The soldiers fell on their food like wolves, made a lot of noise, and created an awful mess.

"General Shivan! How many enemies did we kill today?"

"Equal to that of all previous battles put together, Your Majesty."

"May all who oppose me shudder when they hear my name. May they scream when they learn its true meaning."

"Death!"

"Destruction!"

"Rage!"

"Agony!"

"Grief!"

"But, Father, I'm hungry. Why can't I eat with you in the tavern?"

"Will, I'm not going there to eat. I'm going there to look after your mother."

"Why?"

"Because King Ddraig is in there."

"I've heard stories about him."

"Then you must know why I'm concerned."

After a brief silence, Adam smiled and stroked his son's fair hair.

"Don't you worry - that's my job. Everything will be fine once Ddraig has left. And then, we'll cook your pheasant. All right?" Will gave an unsure smile and nodded. Adam left the family hut, closed the door behind him, breathed in deeply and set off towards the tavern.

Liana was busy preparing more food for the warriors when her husband appeared in the doorway.

"Is everything okay, Liana?"

"So far so good."

"I'll be watching things from that table over there."

"Take this jug of ale - you'll look more relaxed."

Evening turned to night without a problem in sight. Then it happened. Ddraig had been watching a beautiful young serving girl throughout the feast and now, drunk on ale and his own importance, demanded the girl's company. That was when her fiance spoke up:

"Keep your hands off her!"

The tavern was suddenly silent, with tension creeping from every corner.

"Who dares "instruct" me?"

"I do!"

"Why? Why should my pleasure concern you?"

"Because that girl is engaged to me!"

"Oh, I see. Well, young man, engagements can be broken. I think the lady should be given the chance to choose which of us she prefers."

Ddraig turned back to the girl who was now trembling.

"What is your name, dear?"

"Ava. My... my name is Ava."

"Ava. Such a beautiful name. Well, Ava, it appears that your loveliness is the cause of competition. Between your brave fiance and... and King Ddraig. King Ddraig who is feared throughout the land, whose name is legendary and who is certainly not known for backing away from a challenge. So... Ava... Which one do you really prefer, hmm?"

Ava couldn't bear the thought of becoming Ddraig's companion, but neither could she watch her fiance be killed. After thinking long and hard, she slowly approached the dreaded king.

"Ava, what are you doing?"

"I'm sorry..."

"There you are - proof that engagements can indeed be broken."

The young man picked up a large stone jug, raised it high in the air and rushed towards Ddraig:

"As can heads!"

"Absolutely!"

Ddraig stood up and punched the young man's stomach. He then grabbed the jug and hit the youth's head with it. In an instant, he lay dead.

Ava let out a deafening scream and the villagers' anger grew. Without thinking of the odds, they advanced upon the King and his men. Adam was their leader.

"You unspeakable murderer, Ddraig! That boy was not even half your age!"

"My heart bleeds."

"Oh, I shall make sure of that!"

Adam picked up a carving knife but before he could do anything, Shivan grabbed him by the throat and began lifting him up off the ground. Fearing that her husband's neck would soon be broken, Liana rushed across the tavern, holding a bowl of hot broth which she poured into Shivan's face.

Having heard the noises from within the tavern, Will left the safety of the hut and crept towards a hole in the tavern wall. Looking through the hole, he saw that a great fight had now begun. Wherever he looked, chairs were being broken against men's backs, and as the sword and knife fight carried on in the candlelight, the straw-covered floor became more and more red from his neighbour's blood. He could no longer see his father but he saw his mother, and as she struggled with the furious Shivan, she caught sight of her son through the hole.

"Run, Will!"

"But...!"

"Forget about us! Save yourself!"

Will couldn't do it at first - he had to at least try to help. But he soon realized that there was nothing he could do, so he ran off sobbing into the night.

Some time later, Will found himself at the edge of the forest, exhausted. He turned and looked back down into the valley and saw that Ddraig had set the village on fire. His parents, his home... everything he knew was now gone forever. Tears welled up in his eyes. They were not only tears of sadness and sorrow. They were the tears of a ten-year-old's rage.

CHAPTER THREE

Kylan the Wizard

The sun shone high in the sky and it was very hot. Will wondered if the sun was angry at what had happened.

Tired and hungry, he looked around for something to eat but as he had already passed through the forest and was now in the middle of a barren, rocky plain, there seemed little chance of finding food anywhere. Suddenly, he caught sight of a tiny lizard. He was so hungry that he picked up a stone and aimed it at the creature. Then he realized that he would have to eat it raw and he began to feel sick in the stomach. He became dizzy, the stone fell from his fingers, and he fainted.

Lying on the grey, dusty ground, he soon fell into a deep and troubled sleep.

The smell of smoke reminded Will of the burning village. He woke up with a scream but soon found out where the smell was coming from - a blazing fire in the center of the cave in which he now lay. The cave seemed a nice place to be, and the hand that stroked his head was very comforting.

Will turned and saw the man who had rescued him. He wore a long red robe, and a thin band of gold around his bald head. As his face was covered with wrinkles, and as his small beard was completely white, it was clear that the man was very, very old. However, he spoke with the voice of someone many years younger.

"Do you feel well enough to talk?"

Will nodded, looking a little scared.

"Who are you?"

"You wouldn't be able to pronounce the name I was given when I was born. Most people call me Kylan. Although you're the first person I've actually met in over fifty years."

Will had heard the man's name before.

"Are you a wizard?"

"Does it show?"

"Well... I've heard many stories about you."

"And what do these stories say?"

"That you're the kindest, wisest and most powerful magician in the whole world."

Kylan was pleased.

"It's nice to know that history is being recorded correctly. Now then, young man, what do I call you?"

"Will. Will Goldstone."

"How appropriate..."

"What did you say?"

"Oh, nothing."

A short while passed before Will asked:

"How long have I been in your cave, Kylan?"

"It's been two days now. You looked very sick when I found you. But thanks to some bathing and a bit of low-level magic, your bruises, cuts and sunburn have almost faded away. Although, I don't think that mark on your chest will ever leave you. What can you tell me about it?"

Will opened his sack-cloth shirt and looked at the birthmark - a crescent moon and a tiny circle.

"I've always had it. Do you know what it means?"

"No, I'm afraid that I don't."

Kylan was lying.

As the night went on, Will told Kylan about all that had happened. The wizard said that Will could stay with him for as long as he liked. Will thought that the wizard had told him that out of sympathy. However, Kylan had realized how important Will was the moment he first saw the birthmark. He said no more about it. Neither did he invite Will to learn about his magic. Will would have to ask for that himself.

The years went by and Will's hatred of Ddraig grew. He never spoke of it because he knew that Kylan didn't approve of revenge. However, Kylan also

wanted to see Ddraig killed. He wanted it to happen so that the world could once again, be at peace.

Will realized that he needed to find new talents, within himself. He often saw Kylan practicing his magic, but this was something that could never be taught. What Kylan could teach him was how to focus his mind and spirit so that he could use his body to the full. So when Kylan forgot to block off the entrance to his training chamber, Will crept in to see what the wizard was up to.

"I knew that passage must lead to another cave, but I would never have imagined that it would be so big!"

Thanks to the power of magic, the vast stone chamber was filled with grass, bushes and trees. It was where Kylan got his food and the place where he practiced, his own special kind of martial arts.

Will watched with amazement as Kylan, his eyes closed all the time, jumped, twirled and sailed through the air. He leapt from branch to branch before flying head over heels towards the statue in the center of the chamber. It was a statue of Dayzan, the sun god, and Kylan was now standing on its head with one foot.

"You landed on each of those branches for only an instant - you hardly even touched them! How can a man move with such speed and grace?!"

"Practice."

"If I could move like that!"

"You can if you want to. With these skills, together with what your father taught you about hunting, you would be unstoppable."

Will's breathing had become heavy with excitement.

"Teach me! Please!"

Kylan smiled and opened his eyes.

"I would be glad to."

CHAPTER FOUR

Delena

Will sat beside the smoking remains of the previous night's fire. Kylan appeared carrying something wrapped in a piece of leather, and sat down opposite the young man. He poured two cups of sweet red wine, one of which he passed to Will. He held the other high in the air:

"To Dayzan. To the power of good. To Will Goldstone, on his twenty-fifth birthday."

They both sipped their wine.

"You've been so good to me, Kylan."

"And so I always shall. Even though you will be far away from here by tonight."

"What do you mean?"

"Will, you're a man now. A man of great power and skill. What's the use of things like those you've learnt in a cave so far from civilization? See the world, Will. Fulfil your destiny."

"My destiny?"

"All men will know their destiny. Some more than others. Yours is perhaps the most important in our history."

"What is my destiny?"

"That I cannot tell you."

"Can't? Or won't?"

"It will all come clear soon enough. And when it does, you will find it very much to your liking, that much I will tell you." There was a long silence. Will looked at Kylan with a smile and a tear.

"I wish we could always be together."

Kylan passed Will the leather-bound present.

"And so we shall."

Will unwrapped the gift. It was a shiny gold headband, just like the one Kylan wore.

"What's this?"

"A symbol of all you've achieved here. Wear it always. It will keep us in mind of each other."

Since leaving Kylan's cave, Will had spent five years travelling far and wide - through forests, through the wilderness - and had spent time in each village he found. He was now in the city of Galabis, which was of great interest to Will for two reasons. First of all, it was the biggest and busiest place that he had ever seen. More importantly, however, it was very near the Dark Fortress, King Ddraig's home and palace. It stood tall upon a nearby hill, casting a grim shadow across the city.

Will planned to stay in Galabis for a while, to see what he could learn about the fortress. But right now, he needed food and some rest, so he made his way to the city's most popular tavern.

Delena had come to live in Galabis when she was seven years old. Her father, a carpenter, knew he could make more money in the city than he ever could back in their village. He planned to make a wealthy future for his daughter, but both he and his wife died of the sleeping sickness when Delena was ten, so the girl began working in the tavern from that early age.

The dark-haired beauty was happy where she was although she had often dreamed of returning home to see what had become of the boy she once loved. That was now impossible, however, as the village no longer existed.

"A jug of ale, please."

As Will passed Delena a coin, their eyes met.

"Do I know you?"

"That's funny. I was about to ask you the same thing. You remind me of someone I knew a long time ago."

"Maybe I'm the same person."

"No. He's dead. His village was destroyed ten years ago."

Then Will noticed her bracelet. He had made it from animal hair when he was nine.

"Don't you mean our village?"

"Yes... It was where I used to live..."

"...Before your father realised that more people wanted carts in Galabis. Your name is Delena, isn't it?"

"Yes. But how do you know?"

"I thought it was you. When I saw your bracelet, I became certain. I gave it to you the day you left home."

"Will? Will Goldstone?!"

Will nodded. Delena leapt over the wooden counter and embraced her childhood sweetheart.

Will was happier than he had been for a very long time.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Execution

Summer became autumn, and the love between Will and Delena was the strongest that had ever been felt. So powerful were these feelings, Will's thirst for revenge no longer seemed so important. All he could think of was his future bride.

The wedding preparations had all been made. The village square was filled with colourful decorations, and a huge supply of wine stood ready to flow between countless smiling lips.

It was the night before the wedding - the next day, the couple would at long last share the name of Goldstone. In keeping with tradition, Will celebrated with the friends he had made while elsewhere, Delena celebrated with hers.

Spirits were high in the tavern, as Delena's life-long dream was about to come true. However, the cheers soon faded when the tavern doors swung open and two of Ddraig's men entered.

"Why such happiness? Is someone getting married?"

Delena nodded nervously.

"Well, I must say, you've picked a nice time of year for it. Isn't that right, Roj?"

"Yeah."

The tavern was as silent as a grave. For a moment, the men looked as if they were about to leave, and Delena breathed a sigh of relief. But they suddenly grabbed her and she let out a cry.

"What are you doing?!"

"Well, you know... marriage is a very big step. You'd agree, Roj?"

"The biggest, Garn."

"And so, if you're going to take that step, it's best to be sure about your future husband."

"Oh I'm sure!"

"How can you be when you've not looked at the other possibilities?"

"What do you mean?!"

"Well, for a start, there's our boss - your King. He's always had an eye for beauty... and the power to take it!"

Delena screamed as the men dragged her from the tavern.

King Ddraig stood alone in the center of his throne room. Dressed in studded black leather and a long cape, he was indeed a frightening figure although right now, he was very bored.

The doors to the throne room opened and one of his men entered.

"What is it, Garn? Why do you disturb me?"

"I have a present for Your Majesty."

"A present? It's not my birthday."

"Well, I heard that you were bored. And, anyway! You're the King! His Majesty can have a birthday whenever he wants!"

"Very well. What is this present?"

"Bring her in, Roj!"

Delena was led into the dark, echoing throne room.

"Oh, yes! Happy Birthday to me indeed."

He advanced upon the terrified girl.

"What is your name, young lady?"

"D... Delena."

"Delena. A fitting name for such a beautiful creature. Now that you're within the walls of my Dark Fortress, tell me, er... Delena, is it how you imagined it to be?"

"Worse."

"I suppose it could do with a woman's touch... And what of me? How do I make you feel?"

Delena could say nothing.

"Lost for words? Well I know how you make me feel."

Ddraig began stroking her hair and she closed her eyes in terror and disgust.

Finding new courage, Delena opened her eyes and spat in Ddraig's face.

"I'd sooner be dead than live a life with you!!"

Ddraig, his face frozen with surprise, blinked his eyes. He wiped his face clean, and smiled.

"Very well, my dear. Your wish is my command. Take her away, Roj!"

Delena was led quickly to an even less pleasant part of the fortress, while Ddraig walked over to Garn, who he struck with the back of his hand.

"What sort of present do you call that?!"

The sun had risen, and as Will happily made his way to the village square, he saw that a large crowd had gathered. He put his hand on a stranger's shoulder and smiled.

"I didn't expect quite so many people at my wedding."

"We're not here for a wedding. It's a public execution."

Will was horrified.

"An execution? Why would you come to watch such a thing?"

"We had to. It's by royal command."

Suddenly, a terrible scream rang out and Will's blood ran cold - something about the voice sounded familiar. He pushed his way to the front of the crowd and fell to his knees when he saw Delena, tied to a post with a sword through her heart.

He began to shiver, and he cried like a wounded animal. His voice then became a tremendous howl of rage and agony. He looked around for a weapon with which to kill the executioner and guards.

Just then, his headband began to throb, and he heard a voice in his head. It sounded like Kylan:

"Do not take your revenge yet. If you try, you will surely fail. Leave Galabis and walk north."

Confused, Will touched the headband with his finger.

"If this is destiny, Kylan, I don't like it one bit!"

CHAPTER SIX

Ready to Meet Destiny

Unable to think of anything other than Delena's death, Will continued his walk through the wilderness. He had been walking for almost a week now, and the exhausted young man had no idea of where he was going. Eventually, he decided that he could walk no further, so he sat down against a large rock.

Opposite him was a cave. As Will stared into the blackness within, he began hearing tiny, high-pitched noises, like echoing, musical whispers, like something out of a dream.

Once more, the band around his head started to throb, this time causing some pain. He felt dizzy and his eyes were suddenly forced shut. He thought he was falling asleep, and that he was about to meet his most troubled dream in years. However, Will was not dreaming. Will was nowhere.

The voice spoke again. It was definitely Kylan...

"I once talked about destiny. I did not tell you about your own because the time was not right."

"What do you mean, Kylan?"

"Will, the Ancient Scrolls of Dayzan tell of much - not only of history, but of the future as well. King Ddraig has been ruling and ruining our world for far too long. He has lived longer than any man, and he has used his time for one purpose - the creation of misery. Dayzan sent me into the world, not to destroy Ddraig, but to find and guide the one who will. That man is you. I thought as much when I first saw the mark on your chest. Since you left me, events have continued to happen as is written in the Scrolls."

"Are you telling me that you knew Delena would be killed?"

"Of course. I could not tell you because it would have influenced your actions. Now you must fulfil your destiny - driven by vengeance and armed by Dayzan... In that cave, you will find Dayzan's sword and shield. They have lain hidden in there for centuries, surrounded by a lake of fire, waiting to be taken by their rightful owner."

"What if the wrong man tried to take them?"

"That man would surely die."

"So what if I'm not the one?"

"Have faith in my judgment. Have faith in yourself. You will find your mark on the shield - a crescent moon and a crystal of pure gold."

"There's no such thing as a golden crystal."

"It is unique. It is the Sun Crystal, the most powerful of all those created by Dayzan. It will light up the world in our most desperate hour. The crescent moon will free the power of the sun, and victory will be yours. People will call you 'savior'. People will call you King'. Enter the cave, Will Goldstone. Take your weapons and free the world from the shadow of Ddraig."

As Kylan's voice faded, Will opened his eyes. Everything seemed normal again, except for the fact that it was now night.

"I closed my eyes when the sun was in the sky. Now the moon is in its place."

Will spent a long time thinking about all that Kylan had said. He grew worried as he thought about the lake of fire.

"What if Kylan is wrong about me? I will burn alive!" After a while, he realized that he had to take the risk. "Kylan told me to free the world from the shadow of Ddraig. I have to try. I have to find out if I'm the one who can make a

difference. I'd rather burn trying to beat that monster, than live in a world where he is King."

Will stroked his birthmark as if it were a good luck charm. He stood, breathing heavily, in the mouth of the cave. The moment seemed to last forever.

"I must have faith in myself. I must have faith in Kylan. I must have faith in Dayzan."

With that thought firmly in mind, Will took a step forward.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Fight Begins

Will made his way through a narrow passage. With each step came more light - fierce, orange light - and the heat continued to increase.

The passage led into a huge cavern filled with hissing lava. The lava was so hot, Will could feel his face beginning to blister. Staring across the fiery lake, he saw a small rocky mound in the center. The only way it could be reached was by a path of stepping-stones. Some of these stones lay very far apart and some looked too small for a man to stand on.

Will's clothes helped protect his skin from the intense heat of the lava, but he knew that he might pass out if he became too hot. To pass out now would mean certain death, so he removed most of his sweat-soaked clothes, then placed a cautious foot on the first of the stepping-stones.

He found that he could balance on the first stone, but as he stepped onto the next, and the next, he discovered that it was becoming harder and harder to keep his balance. As he stood amidst the swirling, bubbling lake of death, he realized that it would be safer for him to run across. He took a deep breath and ran towards the center of the cavern, and though he nearly fell twice, he made it safely to the weapons.

Will examined the weapons. They were the finest that he had ever seen. He waved the sword high in the air so that he could feel its weight. He was even more impressed when he picked up the shield. The crescent moon shone in the light of the lava, while the crystal in the center was as golden as Kylan had described.

"Special weapons indeed. They could make any man invincible. But only one man shall hold them. And that man is me. Now I'll find out for sure. I wasn't carrying anything when I came across, so the real test will be whether I can get out of here."

With the shield on his arm and the sword held high, Will began to run.

Badly burned but excited and proud like never before, Will stepped out of the cave and into the cool night air.

"Now I shall be able to make a difference! I shall avenge the deaths of my parents, and my one true love. I'll be at the Dark Fortress in about seven days..."

Will's voice echoed, filled with rage:

"Enjoy life while you can, Ddraig! You have only seven days of it left!"

A week had gone by. Will was walking through the forest that surrounded Galabis, when he saw a young woman tied to a huge oak tree. Two of Ddraig's men were now advancing upon her with flaming torches. One of them burned her arm, but she did not scream, even though her eyes were filled with tears.

"How can men enjoy such cruelty?" thought Will as he crept silently towards the torturers. The other man was about to burn the woman when Will suddenly attacked him. He struck the man with his shield, knocking him unconscious, and killed the other with his sword.

He placed his weapons on the ground and began untying the woman.

"Don't worry, it's over. I'll take you to your home."

The woman punched Will in the face and yelled:

"You fool, you've ruined the endurance test! I was supposed to be joining Ddraig's army tomorrow! How long will I have to wait now?!"

Will didn't know what to say. Just then, he saw that the man he had knocked out was now standing again, and was reaching for his sword. Will went to pick up his magic weapons, but to his amazement, he found that they had disappeared.

The woman stood behind him, holding a large, heavy branch above his head. She hit Will on the head with it and he fell to the ground.

Will woke up in a dark, damp dungeon. He sat up quickly when he noticed a large rat near his face.

"Good evening."

The voice came from a heavily built man with a horribly scarred face, who sat chained to the wall opposite Will.

"Which do you want first, the good news or the bad news?"

"Erm... the bad news."

"Well the bad news is that we're going to be executed tomorrow."

"What's the good news?"

"You're awake in time for dinner."

CHAPTER EIGHT

Imprisoned

"Here you are, scum."

The jailer brought in two bowls of awful smelling food which he put in front of the prisoners.

"Enjoy it. It's the last food you'll ever eat."

"Er... you forgot the salt."

The jailer turned to the scarred man angrily.

"Don't try to be funny, Shivan. In fact, don't talk. Eat that slop and that is all. If I hear you talk again, I'll cut your tongue out."

With that, the jailer left the dungeon and locked the door.

Will and Shivan began talking again, but very quietly so as not to annoy the jailer.

"Actually, this 'food' would taste better without the use of a tongue."

Will nodded in agreement.

"So who are you, Shivan?"

"Up until yesterday, I was General Shivan. I had been General Shivan for more than four years. I served Ddraig more loyally than any other man. And now I've ended up in here - another lamb for the slaughter."

"Had you made him angry?"

"No, I'd done nothing. It seems that Ddraig often decides to sacrifice his most valuable men. I only found that out yesterday."

"Why would he do such a thing?"

"Well, for one thing, he thinks that executing someone so important will make his god even more pleased with him. And for another, it means that he'll always be in command of young, athletic generals, because none of us have the chance to grow old. But I think that there's another reason. I think he does it to make sure that no-one powerful will ever betray him - they'll be dead before they can even think about doing so."

"Who is this 'god' you spoke of?"

"Scareth The Destroyer - Lord of chaos, of suffering, and of all black thoughts."

"Do you worship him?"

"I used to."

"When did you stop?"

"Yesterday."

Shivan went on to tell Will all about the following day's execution of the traitors that was to take place, and although his cell-mate certainly seemed familiar, never once did Will recognise him as the man he saw fighting with his mother all those years ago. He didn't know that it was this man's knife that finally cut her throat. Nor did he realize that the scars were caused by the hot broth his mother had thrown on his face.

Eventually, the conversation switched to Ddraig himself and the secret of his power. This made Will very curious, and Shivan very excited. His voice grew louder with each sentence.

"King Ddraig wears a medallion around his neck. It was given to him by a sorceress called Vira. He put it on when he was forty years old, and he has remained at that age ever since. That was over a hundred years ago. If the

medallion is removed, his strength will leave him, and he will 'melt' away. Without that medallion, the mighty Ddraig is nothing!"

At that moment, the jailer returned. He looked furious.

"I told you, didn't I? 'No more noise,' I said. Well let's hear how loud you can be with a mouthful of blood!"

He walked towards Shivan with a sharp, rusty knife. Suddenly, Will threw his food bowl across the dungeon, hitting the jailer's head. The jailer spun round in pain, and was about to make a move towards Will when Shivan leapt to his feet, wrapped his arm around the jailer's neck and broke it with a terrible snapping sound. The jailer's lifeless body slid to the floor.

"You wanted peace and quiet? You've got peace and quiet!"

"Quick, Shivan, throw me his knife!"

The knife flew through the air and landed at Will's feet. He picked it up and tried to break his chain with it.

"What are you doing?"

"Well you know what they say about a chain?"

"No, what do they say?"

"It's only as strong as its weakest link."

Once Will had managed to break his chain, he freed Shivan. "We have to get hold of that medallion!"

"Yes, it's time it was worn by someone else!"

"No! It must be destroyed. And then, our world will finally be at peace."

Will and Shivan left the dungeon in silence. They were about to walk down the corridor when a hand touched Will's shoulder causing him quite a fright. He turned round quickly and was both relieved and surprised to see Kylan. The wizard stood smiling as he held out Will's magic weapons.

"I thought you might need these."

CHAPTER NINE

Out to kill the Tyrant

"Kylan! How did you get into the Dark Fortress?"

"Do you expect me to give away all my secrets?"

"And my weapons! Where did you find them?"

"In the forest where you left them. I took them when you were trying to rescue that strange young woman."

"How could you have taken them? You weren't even there!"

"Oh I was there. You simply couldn't see me."

"So if you were there all along, why didn't you help me?"

"I did."

"By letting me get knocked unconscious?"

"You wanted to get into the Dark Fortress, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, you're here - it really was the simplest way in. Now, you must do what you were born to do. Take your shield, take your sword, and get rid of that evil tyrant."

Shivan was impressed.

"Are you really Kylan? I mean... the Kylan?"

"I am indeed."

"I never expected to meet you. I thought you were a myth."

"It's understandable."

"So now we're a team, eh, Will! Shivan, Goldstone and the most powerful magician in history!"

"Not quite. You see, I've already done more than I'm supposed to."

"Are you leaving, Kylan?"

"Of course. The rest is up to you, and you alone. Don't worry, Will, I shall be watching."

"Wait! Kylan!"

Before Will could say anymore, Kylan had disappeared. Having realized that someone was escaping, the prisoners in the other cells cried out to be set free.

"Please...! Take us with you!"

"We can't - not yet."

"That's right. If we fail and Ddraig finds out that we've all been trying to escape, he'll make the execution as painful as he can."

"Shivan, where will we find him?"

"The throne room. It's this way, come on!"

Ddraig's silver crown reflected the light of countless black candles. He sat upon his throne, discussing the following day's 'celebrations' with his new general, a young man called Tykan... "How many traitors do I have in the dungeons below?"

"Including Shivan and the young man caught in the forest, we have twenty three prisoners."

Ddraig shook his head.

"There must be more, Tykan."

"What do you mean, Your Majesty?"

"I mean there are many more disloyal people to be punished. The Day of Scareth is the day traitors are punished. The medallion that witch gave me says that not all traitors have been arrested. And for that, I want them all caught. Go forth into Galabis, Tykan. Bring me as many as you can find."

Tykan nodded and left the throne room, leaving Ddraig alone to dream of death.

Will and Shivan had heard everything, as they had been hiding below one of the flights of steps that led into the throne room. They both whispered to each other.

"How quiet can you be, Shivan?"

"Like a mouse."

"Good. We have to catch Ddraig by surprise. Now, can you get across to them steps over there without being seen?"

"Definitely."

"Then make your way over but remember, be quiet!"

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to creep up on him from this side, and you'll do the same from the other side, so when we attack, he won't know which of us to try killing first. Understand?"

"To the last letter."

"Then go, and be careful."

Shivan moved backwards through a small doorway. It led into a corridor that was parallel to three sides of the throne room. He moved slowly along the corridor and eventually passed through another small doorway. He was now beneath the other flight of steps, and was deep in thought:

"This is it. Ddraig will soon be dead, and then I can take Vira's medallion for myself! But... but what if we fail? He'll have me chopped into fish-bait. Oh well, he was going to kill me anyway. It's just that we would stand more of a chance if that wizard hadn't left."

An idea suddenly struck him.

"Although... I could help save his life! Then I'd be back in his army - back in a position of power! Who knows? He might even execute that Tykan instead of me! I wish... I wish I knew what to do."

Will stepped silently from his hiding place and crept towards his target. His movements were like those of a cat, and just as silent, so he was able to get right next to Ddraig without being seen or heard for an instant. He held his magic sword high.

Just then, Shivan decided what he would do. With not much time to think about his options, he decided that his old life was better than no life at all. With a single shout, he gave away both his own and Will's presence:

"Look out, Your Majesty!"

Ddraig looked quickly at Shivan, then at Will, and with a swift, sudden movement, he grabbed the young adventurer by the throat.

"What are you doing here, Shivan?! And who is this creature?"

"We shared the same dungeon and escaped together. It's lucky for you that I'm out of there, as I soon found out that he planned to kill you!"

"As if he'd achieve much. Is this true, young man? Are you an assassin?"

Ddraig tightened his grip, making Will choke.

"No! No, Your Majesty! I'm as loyal to you as your new general!"

"But you look like an assassin - you are armed. Why are you armed?"

At first, Will couldn't think of what to say. He hadn't expected to be having this conversation, and on top of that, he was finding it harder to breathe by the second. Then a suitable lie came to mind.

"King Ddraig. I made these weapons for you!"

Ddraig released his grip and Will fell to his knees. "Speak. Make it interesting at least."

"Your Majesty... I am a maker of weapons... and I have spent many months preparing this shield and this sword. I came to offer you these weapons, so that on the Day of Scareth, you can carry the finest shield and hold the finest sword!" Ddraig thought about what Will had said.

"Why should I need your weapons? My own have proved more powerful than any man's, time and time again."

"Yes, but these are special. They are made of a brand new metal. Believe me when I say that they are indeed the best. I will show you if you let me."

"What do you mean?"

"Let us test these weapons against your own. If I am wrong, then I will gladly die for wasting your time."

"Very well. If you are telling the truth, you will die. If you are lying, you will still die. As for you, Shivan, if I find that you are lying, your death will be the slowest of all."

CHAPTER TEN

The Confrontation

Ddraig's men gathered round as their King led Will into the fortress' courtyard. They laughed at Shivan when Ddraig made him kneel with his head on a chopping block.

"You can watch the fight from here, Shivan."

Ddraig passed Will his weapons, then picked up his own. It was to be a difficult fight, as there wasn't much light. The night sky was filled with clouds that hid the moon, and flaming torches created shadows that could fool the eye.

"Scareth will smile tonight. I'm sending Him your soul now, to whet His appetite for tomorrow's feast."

The crowd began chanting as the two swords clashed. Swords struck shields again and again, until Ddraig's shield struck Will in the face, causing him to drop his weapons and fall.

Will looked up at Ddraig's sword as it came towards him. He didn't have time to pick up his weapons, so he rolled out of the way then jumped to his feet.

Ddraig was really enjoying himself. He attacked his unarmed opponent, but Will avoided death with the help of the martial arts Kylan had taught him - whenever Ddraig tried stabbing him, he moved out of the way with incredible speed.

Will grabbed a torch and threw it at Ddraig. He managed to pick up his sword and the fight continued.

"I think you lied to me, young one. I think you do intend to kill me!"

"I do and I will! You've taken everything from me. It's time for you to give something in return - your life!"

Will and Ddraig fought for quite some time, but Will soon became tired. Once again, Ddraig was able to knock him over, and he stood over him with his sword pointing upwards into the night sky.

"Your life is at an end, boy!"

Will found his shield and hid beneath it.

Suddenly, the clouds in the sky drifted apart, revealing the moon - a crescent moon. Its light shone directly into the crystal on Will's shield. A beam of brilliant light shot out of the Sun Crystal and straight into Ddraig's eyes.

The King blinded by the light couldn't see Will getting to his feet. Will rushed over to Ddraig and stabbed him with the Sword of Dayzan. He removed the medallion, threw it to the ground and crushed it with his foot.

The king howled in agony as the years caught up with him. He grew weaker and older, until his head was just a screaming skull. Finally, all that remained were his clothes, which were filled with dust.

The shocked crowd grew very angry, and they began to close in on Will. However, they were soon beaten by Ddraig's prisoners who had been surprised to find themselves mysteriously freed.

Tykan and his men were now locked in the dungeons instead. Will soon realized that it must have been the work of Kylan.

The next day, the people of Galabis gathered at the fortress, having heard the news of Ddraig's death. The people cheered and chanted the name Goldstone, and Will was presented with Ddraig's crown. He put the crown under his arm and spoke to the crowd.

"My friends, we are finally free. I will be glad to be your King, but I will not rule you. You must rule your own lives. Rule them well, and help peace prevail forever. I have lost much, and now want to spend some time alone. I will soon be leaving to live a simple, quiet life, but before I go, I shall perform one royal deed. In honor of my one true love, let this world of ours be given a new name. From this day forward, it shall be known as 'Delenia.'"

Meanwhile, in a far-away cave, an old wizard smiled the proudest smile of all.

"Why didn't he want to live as a King, Grandfather?"

"Because he realized that rulers don't always choose what is right for the people. His world had suffered for a long time because of a King. I think he was afraid of becoming like Ddraig."

"Oh, that would never have happened. He was a good man."

"I agree. But he didn't want to take that chance. So he became King, and then went off to live in the wilderness."

William and Howard heard a car pull up in the snow outside.

"Oh, your parents are here, William."

"Great! I can't wait to tell them about everything that happened!"

"Do you mean our walks, the fishing, the snowmen? Or do you mean what happened in the story?"

"All of it! It's been a terrific week, Grandfather!"

Howard opened the front door and greeted William's parents.

"Hello, Adam. Hello, Liana. Did you have much trouble getting here?"

"Not really, Howard."

"Did you have trouble keeping William away from the TV, Dad?"

"You know... he hardly ever noticed it was there."

- THE END -