

One Last Rest

“I am slowing you all down,” the great wizard told them, gasping for breath from the long walk. “You should go on without me.”

“Sit Master,” the not-so-young apprentice, Randal urged with a gesture towards a fallen tree that lay just off the path.

“You’re a great wizard,” Katha said with a frown. “Shouldn’t you be able to just transport us to our destination with a wave of your hand or your staff?”

The old man gave a near humorless chuckle even as he sat rubbing his arm and attempting to breathe. “I wish it were that simple, lass. Truly I do.”

“Is he gonna make it or not?” Denny asked with a frown. The big man looked very unhappy inside his armor.

“Patience,” Garnell quietly urged. “Can you not see the man needs rest?”

“That’s great, Father Garnell,” the big soldier replied with a frown. “But we’ve got a long way to go and a great deal to do when we get there. And if he’s going to be able to keep the witch queen occupied.... I’m concerned. Greatly concerned.” Father Garnell harbored a similar concern. Infused as he was with the healing power of the archangel Raphael, there was nothing he could do for the old man they’d traveled so far to get. The old man’s time was close. And if the great wizard, Callidus could not help them, then not only had they lost a great deal of time, but their great quest was at an end. They knew of no other wizard who might stand a chance against the witch queen, Cindar.

“We should have taken my flying wagon,” the lovely, young Naeline said with a sigh. “We’d be most of the way there by now and our wizard wouldn’t be having nearly so many breathing problems.”

Randal, the apprentice, turned away from his master with a frown to face the young noble woman. “While we appreciate you being so generous with your gold as well as your willingness to provide us a valuable family heirloom such as the wagon, do you remember why my master told you we could not take it? Please,” he told her with a hint of reproach, holding up a hand to forestall her answer, “Allow me to recap. The witch queen has magical towers placed all through her lands. Some of those towers have been set up with automatic defenses. Large pieces of magic such as your flying wagon would trigger these defenses. Supposing anyone survived that, the real trouble would be just beginning.”

“Yeah, that’s all fine and well,” Denny declared. “But if we can’t accomplish the mission then it’s all been a colossal waste of time.”

“I am sorry,” the great wizard told the group quietly. “I truly thought my strength would last me through this. The witch queen must be stopped. The spread of these soul-metals must be stopped. It seems that old age has finally crept up on me. I’ve let you down and this entire world as well.”

“Don’t be silly Master,” Randal told him with a frown. “After a little rest, you’ll be fine again.”

“No my friend, I will not. I feel it now as I have not before. There is an angel nearby waiting to take me to what comes next. I can hear his or her wings sometimes. The wind from those wings gives me hope for what I will soon face.

“Father Garnell?” the old wizard continued “Could I ask a favor?”

“Of course,” the balding priest replied, walking to the sitting wizard. “What would you ask?”

“I would ask three blessings of you,” the old wizard replied with a sad smile. “First, I would ask a blessing upon my family. Long has it been since I’ve seen them. Too long perhaps.”

“But you’re a thousand years old,” Katha said with a confused frown she shared with Denny and Naeline. “How could you still have any living family?”

The old wizard gave her a smile but turned back to the priest without answering.

Father Garnell spread his arms wide, “May the blessings of the angels and the Creator keep your family prosperous, healthy, and in wisdom.” A silver glow enveloped the priest’s hands and waves of light left him traveling in all directions.

“I would ask a second blessing upon myself,” he told the no longer glowing priest. “While I’ve known death was coming for some time now... I admit I am still frightened. I have learned more than most in this life and yet this coming step is one I take in ignorance. I ask a blessing as I prepare to go where we all eventually go.”

“Take the step not in ignorance but in faith.” The good father stepped up and placed a hand upon the old wizard’s forehead and heart. “Know that you go where our ancestors await. As you follow in their ultimate footsteps, so shall they greet you and show you the ways of the next life. Old acquaintances, long lost, shall be made new again. Lovers long departed shall be embraced anew. And in the fullness of time, you shall learn much more about the mysteries of life. You shall not depart this life unmissed and you will not enter the next life unescorted.” The old man wiped a tear from his cheek.

“Thank you father,” he said with a true smile. “You have uplifted my spirit as I would not have believed possible.”

“My pleasure,” the priest replied with a kind smile of his own. Dejected, Katha joined Denny and Naeline in sitting on a mound of rocks at the edge of the clearing.

“I would ask one final blessing, Father Garnell,” the old man told him.

“Ask, and if it lay within my power, it shall be.”

“I would ask a blessing upon my friend here,” the old wizard said with a fond pat on Randall’s leg.

“No!” Randal declared, scowling at the old man.

“Yes!” the wizard countered with surprising strength. “For too long you have fostered dark feelings within you. Blamed others for the ill fates you have received. Others who have not deserved that blame. If I have taught you nothing else, then listen to these words of a dying man! Anger kept overly long burns you within. Those flames leave naught but ash behind. Your feelings deserve better than that. Take the blessing! Allow yourself to finally begin healing!” A coughing fit then overtook the old wizard. Clutching his chest, it was several long minutes before he could control it enough to regain the shallow breath that was all he now seemed capable of managing.

Without a word, the priest turned a look upon the younger wizard. Anger flashed across that man’s face. Yet within those angry eyes, the good father thought he saw more than anger... he was almost certain there had been fear as well. After a moment, he stepped forward with obvious reluctance. Father Garnell placed a hand over his forehead and heart. The fellow took a step back, but a pleading look from the old wizard caused him to move forward again.

“For each of us there is a path. Some are short and straight and some are long and winding. Angels above, aid this man in walking his path. Show the way even as you bring him healing and guidance. Help him to understand that we are only truly alone when trapped within ourselves.” As

the glow again faded from the priest's hands, the younger wizard stepped away. Father Garnell felt certain this time the look in the man's eyes had been fear before he quickly turned away.

"Thank you, father," the old wizard told him with a smile. "And thank you, Randall for putting up with my request." The young wizard simply nodded. "Now I have one final request to ask of you and I will leave you in peace."

"Name it," the young wizard responded, sounding choked up as he looked out into the woods.

"I would ask that the deal we brokered on the day we met be broken now. I thought I had the strength to fulfill it. Now I see that I do not. After all these years, I would like to see my family again, this one last time."

A moment of silence followed before Randal replied. "It shall be done. Would you like me to transport us there or would you prefer to do the spell yourself?"

"I think it would be better for you to cast it," the old man told him quietly with a sad smile.

"Wait," Katha said, running over to them. "You can't just up and leave us. We're almost to the Damned Reaches."

However, the younger man reached out and grabbed something that none of them could see. Suddenly his hand held a brilliantly burning green light. That light expanded and suddenly the two wizards were gone.

"If he could do that to leave, then why didn't he do that to get us here?" Naeline demanded angrily.

Denny cursed. Shaking his head, he said, "I think a better question would be what do we do now?"

"The village looks just like I remember it. I could almost expect to see my wife walk out of the bakery. I suppose I'll be seeing her again soon. I hope so, anyway."

"It does look the same, doesn't it?"

"We've traveled far, you and I. Seen more than I ever dreamed." He stood for a moment simply trying to breathe. "I'm sorry I yelled at you back there. It was arrogant of me to suggest that I'd ever taught you anything."

"No. You were right. And you taught me at least as much as I taught you. That seems to be the way of student-teacher relationships. No, you spoke truth, I admit it. I suppose I have been holding onto my anger. Fact is, I'm not sure what I'd do without it."

"Perhaps you would be happy," the old man told him with a sad smile.

"Mayhaps. I don't know. Maybe I'll find out."

"Then perhaps we are both going on voyages into the unknown."

"I'm going to miss you, old friend," the younger-looking man told him with a tear working its way down the side of his nose.

"If it's alright with you, I would like my name back for this last evening. Bearing your name was much more of a burden than I ever imagined. Not that you didn't warn me. You did that and more. But, I am surprised to find that I missed being plain old Randal."

"You were never plain. The spark of magic within you ensured that you would never be ordinary. I confess, I will miss being Randal. An apprentice that no one looks to in order to right the wrongs of the world."

“I suppose we’ve expanded each other’s horizons then,” the old man chuckled, which devolved into a coughing attack. When the old man again got his breath, he found they were no longer in the village but near a large, prosperous farm outside it.

“I wish I had succeeded in teaching you the immortality trick,” the younger looking man sighed regretfully.

“It might surprise you to learn that I am not sorry. No, the years I’ve lived have been enough. I have seen and done great things with you. But it is time for me to move on.”

With a gesture, the immortal indicated the collection of barns and the large house down the hill. “This is the farm where your sons and daughter live with their families. As you can see, I kept my promise to you. They are doing well. They have never known a lack of anything that silver can buy. Here, they live a simple life raising animals and tending the land. Your son Josiah has a shop in town where he works silver. At the end of the day, he rides back here. Sometimes he takes his son and daughter with him. Sometimes he takes their children with him.

“I’ve made a very selfish bargain with you Randal. While you’ve seen distant lands and far off worlds traveling with me, you’ve missed out on your family. They’ve grown. And I’ve robbed you of seeing that.”

“No, you have not. I was a man poor of spirit, without money, and without hope when I met you. My wife dying was no fault of yours. Neither was my debt. At the age of forty and four I became an apprentice worker of magics. You erased my debts and saw to it that my family would never need for money or want for food. You took me away from my self-destructive misery and gave me something constructive to do with my life... the very thing I’d like to do for you. You’ve given me perhaps the greatest bargain anyone could have ever asked for.”

“It doesn’t seem so from here,” the other man whispered, looking down at the farm.

“That because you only walked with my name. You never had my eyes. And my eyes saw life much differently then. You’ve given me the time and wisdom to understand what is truly important in this world. Without that lesson, I would die with my potential unmet. But that is not how I will go into the next realm.”

Opening his mouth, no words came. The other man simply watched the children playing and men and women working.

“Do you know where my wife’s grave is?”

“I’ve seen it several times as I’ve scryed the farm, keeping an eye on things.”

“Good. I’d like my body to rest next to hers. She died too young. And while I’ve wandered across the world and beyond, for me, without her here the house remained just a house. But now that I’m here to finally join her, this place feels like home again. And you know what? I am truly at peace now.”

“Then once more I envy you my friend.”

“Bah, peace is good for the end of the day. Your day is just beginning. Revel in the light. When night finally falls, then you will have your peace.”

“And you say I taught you wisdom.”

“Indeed I do. And if I can give back even a small portion, then I feel well and truly blessed.” The old man looked around over each shoulder before turning back to his friend. “I can hear the angel’s wings most clearly my friend. I do not have long before my voyage begins.” He then lay down in the grass against a hillock which provided him a good view of the farm below, clutching his chest with a grimace of pain. “Help them in their quest. The witch queen has been allowed to grow too strong. And this soul-metal is a greater evil than I have seen. Do something good for the world...”

and perhaps allow something good to happen to you in so doing.

“Oh! She’s here!” he gasped. Smiling, his eyes closed one last time.

The next morning, the family was shocked to find a twenty foot high marble monument in their family cemetery.

The first inscription read: Here Dee of Farmdale made her first steps into the next world. Loving mother and devoted wife, she went clothed in the warmth of her family’s love.

The second inscription read: Here Randal of Farmdale at last returns home.

Farmer

Husband

Father

Wizard

The life of a magic worker is not for everyone, but it suited him well. Sometimes during storms, the monument glows to this day.