

Chapter One: Guardians Of The Sansa'laa - Part Two

King Goodheart remained still a moment, studying the distant lands. His wavy long hair, overdue for a cut, fluttered softly in the breeze under his common-crown. He turned to his guards with a pale, overcast expression. "Where are my forces?" Though his voice was barely a whisper, it echoed in the wind.

Puzzled, Evan regarded his father. There was something else. Someone else. No, he was right the first time, *something* else. Watching them. He searched the area, scrutinising every bush, shrub, tree and large rock. But he couldn't see what he was looking for.

"Come, my love," Queen Leolea said, taking her husband's arm. "The air cools. We will sup on the hour." She gathered her skirts effortlessly with her other hand.

No. Evan didn't want to go in. Not yet. There was still so much to do. He wanted more time with them all.

The dark castle stood ominously in the distance, sharply pointed trees lining the land like great teeth.

His parents were already a good distance away, their long shadows stretching ahead, as if they were walking into the darkness of themselves.

Evan turned to say something to Reisa.

She was drenched in sweat, tears streaming down her muddied, horrifyingly disfigured face. A thick line of purple bruising shuddered across her neck as her jaw moved with silent screams.

Evan tensed and blinked, stepping back sharply.

Reisa's unreadable smile and dreamy eyes were upon him again.

He stared at her a moment before returning her smile. Did he just imagine what he thought he saw?

"Come, young lord," Willhem said, ushering them towards the castle. Though his throat had been ripped out, his voice was somehow still smooth and controlled.

"Yes, young lord," Nat said dryly, knocking his shoulder into Evan as he stepped past. "You two may have won the spark, but such child's play is beneath me, anyhow. Just you wait for our Missions. The true test of men."

Evan noticed the object in Nat's swinging hand – a rotting crow's head, dripping with thick blood and severed muscle. Somehow, the crow's beady eyes were following Evan. It attracted a dozen insects as Nat walked, but his friend seemed oblivious.

Evan turned to Reisa, but she was not there. He spun around, his heart racing now. She was nowhere to be found.

The sky darkened as Evan realised he was alone.

Something disturbed the air behind him. He turned to see the flash of a glittering object. He continued to turn, trying to identify it, his shoulders tensing. Suddenly the object stopped in front of his face.

Evan's eyes widened at the fully grown Wind Stalker hovering before him. Its long spindly legs wavered in the air, large luminous petal wings fluttering in a mesmerising display. He marvelled at its gleaming scaled underbelly and the golden crown of feathers that shone blindingly and lit the grey world. Blades of grass flicked feverishly under the force of the great entity. Evan's breath caught, the air burning with an intense power.

This was no ordinary Wind Stalker, he knew right away. The holy insects usually took years and years to grow from a spira spark, and were three times smaller than this one, which was larger than a king crow. Its light held a holy power that froze Evan to the core.

He knew what this was now. Ellousellas. The Secret Guardian. Sky Father himself. He who had not shown himself on the mortal plain for millennia.

You should not be here, said a gravelly voice that sounded leagues away, filling the land.

It must have been the voice of the Sky Father, and yet the old, croaky tone was somehow familiar.

You have no business here. You are not welcomed!

Evan held a hand up to shield himself from the torrential wind, his shirt whipping around him.

The Sky Father shifted forward, its beady eyes enthralling Evan. Its furious wings beat with the velocity to move mountains, almost as if they were attacking Evan.

By the strength of the Holy Vail and the Valour of Andaano the First, I cast you out! *The voice boomed, echoing through the field and shaking the trees.*

Evan cowered back, suddenly greatly afraid. He had never felt such intense power like this. What had he done to earn the Sky Father's wrath? He had always thought Ellousellas was a blessed being. But this creature carried with it a venom so powerful that Evan could feel how much it wanted to hurt him.

He wanted his parents. Where were his parents?

Whispers all around. Several voices, all barely audible. Coming from every direction. Why did he recognise them?

The great Wind Stalker took off in a fury of legs and wings. It shot through the sky and became a dwindling glow in the darkness as it sped towards the castle.

Adjusting to the dim light, suddenly cold from the Sky Father's absence, Evan searched through the dead land. Ghoulish moans and screams echoed softly in the wind, growing louder and diminishing, as if passing over him. Through the turmoil, he picked out children's laughter. Reisa's melodic laughs.

Evan turned around to see the beaches of Moon Bay. The gleaming sand patches and iridescent ocean waves were shining in the bright light of day, though the surrounding land remained in darkness.

Reisa and Nat, in the same swimwear they wore that day, ran towards the water in fits of laughter, along with their other friends. Among them, Evan saw himself also. He seemed so happy in the moment. Although there was a dark shade to him, as if he were in shadow, despite the bright sunlight. He could taste the salt in the sea air.

Evan recognised the scene and was struck by a crippling fear.

No! he called out, though could not hear his own voice.

He sprinted towards them, anxiously searching the surrounding rocks. If they were here—if they were all here now—that meant that monster would be here too. He just knew it. *No, no, no*, Evan thought frantically, his heart racing. It wasn't meant to be this way. It hadn't been like this.

Another voice carried in the wind. A frantic plea for help.

His mother.

Across the field, back in the dark land, his mother lay over the body of his father. Tears streamed down her tortured face.

Laughter continued from the beach, mixing with the soothing sound of waves and sea breeze. Evan hesitated. Reisa needed him before that thing found her. He could save her this time. Another desperate wail from his mother.

Then he was rushing forward, stumbling towards his ailing parents. He tried to ignore the childish laughter, which had now taken on a darker, twisted echo.

As he neared his parents, they appeared to move farther away. He called out, but the distance between them continued to increase.

Dead leaves and chips of dirt whipped around him. Something was pushing him back. A dark force that was chillingly familiar. A heavy wind grew around him, swirling into a vortex. He cried out, his eyes shut tight, as he willed himself to break through the force.

Tears streamed down his face. The sense of the dark force suddenly subsided, clearing like a great pressure releasing in his head.

Evan skidded through the soggy mud and came by his parents side.

His father's shallow breaths cast weak mists in the air. Several long gashes covered his bloodied torso, as if torn by a great beast. Evan called to him, but his father did not react. The man's eyes remained half closed with weakness.

"You did this," his mother spat at Evan, her voice dark with a monstrous echo. Her eyes blazed with a quivering fierceness. "Look what you have wrought upon us!"

A devastating horror struck Evan. His mother's face was so twisted in disgust. "I... I did not. I would not..." the words were weak breaths, drowned out by the storm.

"A *curse!*" his mother screamed, choking with emotion. "You have brought a curse on our household. Demon spawn! Demon spawn!"

"No!" Evan cried. He gathered his father in his arms, needing to speak with him.

He turned the king's head up to find an ashen, rotting corpse. Cold dead eyes stared up at him.

"NO!" Evan's tortured scream echoed through the hills, rising instead of diminishing. The world trembled until his cries bore into his very being. He shook his father, willing the life back into him. He couldn't lose him, not again.

He turned to his mother, to instead find a black demonic presence looming over him.

It sprang forward and consumed him in darkness.

Well that took a dark turn! What did you think about this look into Evan's life? The idea was to show Evan's home life and allude to some themes and events that will happen later.