Magic had all but disappeared from the world, rumors still existed of its use in dark places spoken in whispers. In the Empire and its long and oppressive reach it was banned; punishable by death. The laws were written in dusty and worn old books delicately handled by scholars or their students in libraries in the great Universities scattered across the lands. Why would there be laws if it had not existed the older and wiser spoke.  
  
Fools!  
  
  
The younger responded do you believe everything written hundreds of years ago  in the long forgotten past.  
  
But the wise held their tongues and the wisest knew that the cycles of time were bringing great and terrible events that the stars and prophecies of old foretold. One didnt need a crystal ball to see the portents that were written as clearly as the bright leaves on the autumn trees speak of winter to come.  
  
  
But winter brings spring and the prophecies spoke of a winter with no spring.  
  
Other rumors also spoke about magic alive in the deep and impenetrable mountains covered in pine and fir and oak in the lands far across the weathering westering wuthering seas.  
  
where the wild folk loves where songs  wove spells and enchantments causing the green things to grow, the rain to fall and enemies to be stricken down. But those were rumors and they were comfortably far away across the sea were only the soldiers and brave merchants went.  
  
On occasion small children would show uncanny abilities but were quickly spirited away.  
  
The day and been rainy and dark and now the night threatened rain. If you were out you would have seen the warm glow fe the windows of a well lit inn. It sat secure in the village surrounded by stone walls and two gates which the watchmen closed at night.  
  
In a tavern  ?A joke, this must be a joke, said in the tavern. On that same night far away.  
  
  
On a unusually dark and silent beach far to the West peace lay over the slumbering coast and villages scattered along its shore line that creeped north like a serpent twisting and coiling far to the icy north.  
  
In a comfortable inn full of laughter and talk men sat discussing these things. The fisherman and foresters even the wealthy son of a great merchant was amongst them.  
  
Only the slow sound of waves and the gentle paddle of a rowboat that slowly and silently made its way through the stormy night until it grounded on the sand. Two figures huddled in the boat cloaked and hooded in black.  
  
As the boat approached the shore one leaped out with quick and powerful agility and pulled the boat in. The other figure slowly got out and steadied himself before stepping into the cold black water. As the wind billowed around his black cloaks you could see his body was gaunt and skinny, a mere shadow of a creature half dead. The larger figure helped steady him as they wordlessly waded through the ocean waves as the water slowly receded leaving them standing on firm but sandy ground.  
  
They moved slowly up the beach closer to the tall and imposing line of deep woods and mountains rising up before them wreathed in immoebetrevle mists and clouds. Half way up the beach they stopped and stood motionless, the larger figure shifted uneasily. To an outside observer the darkness would have seemed to gather about them fear would have slowly gripped them and spread outwards. The gaunt figure staggered and began to slump forward supported by his companion. Once again they began moving but this time The gaunt figure rested on the larger one as they slowly started their way back up the beach into the overhanging woods  
  
A strange fragile power seemed to hang about him. The villagers that night sat warm and comfortable by their fires ignoring the wind and rain that frequently buffeted the coast. But that night an unusual dread seemed to spread through the village. Windows were bolted as fear grew to terror; children were hushed by mothers. Children hid beneath their blankets, fathers gazed uneasily at the doors and windows as they sat up through the night. Cold sweat grew on many and even the bravest felt despair. Dogs growled then slowly the growls turned to whimpers as they hid beneath beds and behind furniture. Whispers began to grow, ?the dead have risen, lock your doors.?  
  
?The dead want to drag you down with them.?  
?the dead are restless and angry!?  
  
The next day the rumors ran wild; the dead had visited them, prepare! They would come back, they were restless and angry. Only later would people begin to wish that it truly had been the dead that had walked among them. For not all the dead are poisoned by malice and hate.  
  
Far, far away Alex hurried up the windswept slope. Grass and rock covered the gently rolling hills. A blue sky covered in rushing clouds stretched above him. The air smelled of the great ocean even though it lay many miles to the west.  
  
It was nice to get away from the luxury and filth of the city he thought. Out here no one is popular or  unpopular.  
  
special, there are no slaves or nobility or bullies .  
  
He thought with anger of b the leader of the bullies and the populatinst boy in school. He was tall, powerfully built wealthy and handsome.  
  
 He held utter disdain for anyone below him only the privileged were allowed to speak to him and his close friends. The only times they spoke to the lesser was when they were bullying or mocking them.  
  
His father was a senator and his uncle was a famous general he had recently placed 4th in the yuy competition unheard of for a second year.  
  
Alex thought were on a collision course.  
  
He thought of his sister she was beautiful but cold he had never seen her speak to anyone though all the boys tried to get her attention.  
  
Alex felt joyful as he walked through the wild tall grass. His school  
Work was finished and he had the rest of the day and the day after to  
Himself. He was hurrying back to his favorite place far away to the north one of the few places you could escape the large towns and cities and roads that sprawled to the south.  
  
You don?t care how many friends i have  
  
that I am an orphan do you he said to the beautiful wild stallion that had rushed to meet him.  
  
Were going back to the cliffs he said as the beautiful wild stallion charger as he gently stroked its head. The horse whinnied and nuzzled him. It then nuzzled his tattered coat, yes he laughed I brought you something he pulled out an apple and the horse neighed happily. Alex was slightly built and small for his age he had shockingly blond hair And was also beautiful.  
 But he was branded he came from one of the conquered provinces and was looked down upon by the citizens of the imperialistic country that had Slowly grown to dominate.  
  
 with signs that he would be the handsomest man in the city but he was poor and an orphan and the bullies hated him.  
  
We best look out for ghosts he laughed. The horse pricked its ears and seemed to query him, ghosts ?  
  
Oh yes apparently it's haunted up here some great battle that happened a long time ago.  
  
The whole thing seems pretty silly to me he said patting the horse affectionately.  
  
The ghosts not the battle I mean.  
  
The horse arched its neck at him as if to say lets see if you feel so brave when the dusk gathers.  
  
Alex seemed to guess the horses thoughts, you'll keep me safe I don't think anything could catch you.  
  
Well anyways Alex said  
  
Up I come he said mounting the horse in a fluid graceful movement.  
  
They set off over the grass  
  
You know he went on I heard that this whole area used to be covered in a great wild forest and I heard that the fair folk used to live here wild and free I wish it was true.  
  
I've never seen a forest he went on but I know I would love it. Maybe some day we can head to the rugged north and see trees.  
  
  
He thought of all the trees he had found hidden in a cleft in the rocky and barren hills. Trees, real trees! He had heard rumors of forests in faraway places but only the wealthy had small and stunted trees on their property. A sign of wealth and privilege that few could afford. His mind drifted as He gracefully mounted the great black horse. He hurried up the windswept rocky slope, in his mind he was walking through a deeply wooded forest though he had never seen one in real life, his imagination could only see the trees as spread out and no taller then 12 or 14 feet.?  
  
He was tall and skinny with thick jet black hair. He was quickly becoming dashingly handsome but had been awkward and slightly built as a youth. Which had led to his bullying that had carried over to his teen years. He was also kind and friendly Alex couldn't believe how someone so generous could be treated so poorly and it angered him.  
  
As he had grown up he And became more handsome the girls began to take an interest in him which infuriated the bigger and more popular boys.  
  
Alex hated injustice and cruelty.  
  
You know he said idly as he petted the great horse. to the great horse in the north there are great mountains covered in trees can you imagine?  
  
Something in the grass caught his eye as the bright afternoon sun glinted off of something. He paused and stared off to his left trying to catch another glimpse.  
  
He quickly slid off the horse and said stay here girl.  
  
The horse neighed a reply and Alex  
waded through the long dried grass That had withstood the wither ing heat of the summer.  
  
He tried to be cautious because he knew there could be dangerous things out here.  
  
As he got closer he He realized with shock what it was, A dwarf!  
  
He had never seen a dwarf and wondered if they truly existed but there was one right before him.  
  
The dwarf saw him at the same moment he saw it.  
  
Stay back laddie he grunted I do nah want to hurt you.  
  
It was a dwarf he looked faint and was lying clearly injured, or was it a trap?  
  
Alex stood irresolute. He wanted to help him but He had heard Dwarves were fierce and dangerous And even more perilous with any kind of weapon And his strong and wiry fingers were clasped around a bright single bladed axe.  
  
 Are you injured?  Alex said gently I don't want to hurt you.  
  
Alex moved a little closer and saw a dark patch that looked like blood seeping through his torn blue tunic.  There were patches of chain mail peeking though his torn outer tunic it looked like he had been stabbed.  
  
It was obvious he had been though a lot and was barely holding on. He was banged up and covered in dirt.  
  
At the sight of him lying injured and helpless he said I'm going to come closer I'm not going to hurt you and And he moved with quick and easy grace towards him.  
  
Stay back the Dwarf grunted trying to sit up but failing his right hand weakly held a dagger that he pointed at Alex.  
  
Alex stopped he had never met a dwarf but he had heard they were strong and fierce and even though he was deeply injured Alex had a feeling he could be very dangerous.  
  
I just want to check your wound and help you Alex said gently. He realized he was sweating from the afternoon sun and the tense situation he reached up and wiped the sweat from his eyes.  
  
You going to bring me to the slavers He asked. And get your reward  
  
No! Alex said vehemently I despise them.  
  
The dwarf laid back and closed his eyes but Alex stood his ground he didn't want him to feel threatened.  
  
My old dad always worried I would get into trouble he said through gritted teeth. He had dropped the knife and was holding his side. When I was a small lad I got lost my parents were sick with worry. They searched low but they didn't search high.  
  
He chucked at his joke then winced in pain.  
  
My side he clutched the wounded spot.  
  
He opened his eyes and looked at Alex  
  
High and low he said, you know the saying search high and low. Well they thought I was below ground but I was up amongst the trees. But I was lost one of the fair folk found me she was beautiful and gentle and.  
  
He stopped talking clearly exhaust.  
  
Alex slowly moved closer  
  
I want to help you he said again genuine as he saw him clutch the  
Dagger.  
  
Atelee  
  
Didnt your parents warn you it's dangerous to be Out wandering in these places. He grunted out.  
  
I don't have any Alex said.  
  
The dwarf opened his eyes and looked at Alex and seemed to come to a conclusion.  
  
I could use some help I am afraid there is not much you can do but I am thirsty.  
  
Do you have any water he asked weekly I haven't had a drop in two maybe three days Or any food for that matter.  
  
Yes Alex and quickly pulling out his water flask. He moved with grace and speed over to the dwarf  
  
He propped the fierce and powerful dwarfs  head and rested it on his knee as he slowly helped him drink. He was shocked at how strong and muscular the drwaf felt.  
  
Thank you he said and smiled weakly your A good lad.  
  
Alex smiled back I'm going to try to move your chain mail this may hurt but I need to see how bad are injured.  
  
As he pulled it over his head he gasped his chest was bruised and bloody and black and deeply infected.  
  
It's bad isnt it the dwarf asked you can tell me. I know it ain't pretty.  
  
Alex gasped in shock  but quickly tried to hide it he didn't want him panicking. He said well it needs some attention and well how long ago did this happen? It was clearly badly infected.  
  
Arros  
  
It's been a week the Dwarf said they been hunting me. Fell of a cliff to escape them, might not have been the smartest thing I've ever done but there was a river at the bottom. Dwarves aren't exactly natural swimmers most of us don't know how. I was taught as a young one, but I was hurt and it was more like I floundered.  
  
Alex looked at him with new respect but he also gasped as he realized the extent of his injuries.  
  
Alex's mind whirrled he had nothing to take care of something like this. Well you are injured he said trying not to alarm him.  
  
Yes the dwarf said I've been trying to head north but it's been rough going.  
  
Alexa mind whirled with questions. Nit the one he blurted out was why did you come so far south don't you know how valuable dwarves are as slaves?  
  
That I did lad, and it was foolish but my parents were taken and I couldn't live with myself sitting snug and comfortable deep beneath the northern mountains.  
  
I would do the same, Alex smiled at him. Of course I don't have any family or many friends but I would do it if I had loved ones.  
  
Injured though he was the dwarf took pity on Alex.  
  
Tsk tsk it will come give it time.  
  
Yes but first things first we need to get you help.  
  
  
  
Then when that the situations reversed  
  
You might be the only dwarf who seems to love trees as much as precious stones.  
  
  
That's twice now one of the fair folks saved me.  
  
Well Alex said the fair folk died out long ago he was about to add and I hope I can save you but he stopped himself short.  
  
  
  
Shish Alex said There are two soldiers riding on the trail be quiet I don't think they will see us.  
  
Don't risk your life for an injured dwarf he whispered you're young you have a full life, I'm probably not going to make it you should get away while you still have time.  
  
I'm not leaving you here Alex said. They both sat in silence has the two Soldiers Rode by. Alex lay flat in the grass his breathing coming heavy with the fear that gripped him. He smelled the strong scent of the earth coming up from the from the soil as he lay in silence. He could hear their horses and with relief he heard as they slowly started to get farther and farther away. Luckily they lay in a small ravine Alex threw his coat over the axe head to keep it from glinting again in the sun and giving away their position. Perspiration started to come down his face as he heard them stop and come back towards them.  
  
He heard them talking  
  
Look at that horse!  
  
Someone whistled and he heard the second soldier reply  
  
You might as well try to catch the wind.  
  
It's not running though think what she would fetch at the market!  
  
He heard one of them make a clicking noise Alex was now pressed down as hard as he could in the tall grass he knew they could see him at any moment and they were getting closer as they approached the horse standing near them. Alex looked up and concentrated his though on the horse.  
  
It watched him alert.  
  
Get them out of here he whispered as quietly as he could.  
  
Then come back.  
  
The horse seemed to understand and it darted off like a lightning bolt.  
  
You spooked her he heard one of the soldiers say roughly.  
  
Too bad well it was worth a try.  
  
Whoa whoa, whoa your not puttin me on that great bestie are you? I thought you were trying to save my life not end it!  
  
Trust me Alex said it will be just like your lying in your bed.  
  
Do you think you can stand Alex asked.  
  
I can give it a try he replied.  
  
Oh your leg!  
  
Yes I'm afraid they stabbed me there too.  
  
Alex felt sick, he steadied himself for a minute then said, ok I'm gonna try to get you on the horse it's not safe here but there is a small mountain cave where you will be safe. Then ill ride back to town and get some food and supplies to help take care of you.  
  
Ok he said, your a good lad I hope I can do you a favor some day.  
  
No need Alex replied with a laugh lets just get you taken care of.  
  
By the time Alex got him placed on the horse he laid sprawled out and they began walking. Alex looked to the west and saw storm clouds gathering, they looked dark and ominous.  
  
The dwarf laid astride the horse he looked small on top of the great charger. He was mostly unconscious so Alex walked beside as they continued through the rolling grassy hills north. The horse seemed to sense his burden needed a gentle ride because he seems to almost float.  
  
I sure hope he is ok when we get there Alex said. The horse whinnied in reply.  
  
They continued on thought the rolling hills as the wind kicked up and storm clouds began to gather.  
  
  
Chapter 2  
Alex snuck slowly in he knew he was last curfew but no one had spotted him. As he snuck around the corner a pretty blond girl almost ran into him.  
  
Sara! He exclaimed nervously  
  
Normally he would ignore her she was wealth and pretty and popular and Alex knew his place. The think blue bracelet on his wrist was a constant reminder.  
  
He had seen her around but never spoken to her. Her father was wealthy a duke and a knight and he governed a number of cities.  
  
I know your up to something she said with a mischievous smile.  
  
Alex felt panic run through him helping a slave escape was punishable by enslavement in the mines. A punishment worse then death.  
  
Shh not so loud, Alex said then quickly added but of course it wouldn't matter I'm not up to anything at all.  
  
She smiled ok fine you can keep hour little secret. don't have to tell me if you don't want to I understand. But I do hope I'm not missing out on anything amazing. The most adventurous thing I've done all year is stay up late eating junk food when I should be studying.  
  
Oh I do that every night Alex replied laughing well I eat a snack every night. It lately I have been eating healthier foods.  
  
Alex suddenly realized he was talking to a girl. A very pretty girl and became tongue tied. Sara was so easy to talk with. But he suddenly began to feel shy, well anyways he said I should probably get to bed its getting late and I have class tomorrow morning.  
  
Ok well she smiled then she suddenly seemed shy (which Alex thought later he must have imagined) then she went on well anyways of you do ever decide to share some of your adventure, that would be fun. Ok night she said then darted off.  
  
The second she turned te corner Alex felt incredible lonely he suddenly realized how alone he was and how few friends he had. But Sara seemed so nice not haughty like the other girls.  
  
He wondered if she hasn't noticed the mark around his neck. No way everyone knew about that. He walked back slowly to the dorms wondering if he should tell her about the dwarf. He knew her father was wealth an powerful he had been a Senator and now now recently been elected as.  
  
She seemed nice but of she knew he was abetting a dwarf and helping a slave he would be sentenced to hard slave labor in the mines and that was a death sentence.  
  
She said she wanted adventure though. Maybe he could tell her it was risky and dangerous and make her swear not to tell anyone.  
  
  
Chapter 3  
He wore a hideous mask and black cloaks. He moved with deadly and lightning speed. The sword flashed hard smashing the stick out of sssd hand, he recoiled in fear a look of terror on his face.  
  
Chapter 4  
  
And whole civilizations  were built with With and around it and I know this is kinda strange but I feel somehow connected to them. Like there a part of me.  
  
  
Warrior friend Tries to save his people Is captured Alex sees him punished  
  
  
  
Chapter 2  
  
When he came to the school  
He thought he would make a lot of friends.  
  
Alex walked nervously up the steps into the arena other students were everywhere laughing and talking nervously. All the visions he had of fitting in and making friends were flying away across the clouds.  
  
  
Each step made Alex want to turn around and run home, funny he thought as he realized he had never belonged much in the orphanage 200 miles away and now it felt like home.  
  
Was one of the most privileged and elite schools in ish.  
  
You over here whats your name. A tough looking instructor called to Alex come over here and get your equipment.  
  
He stood nervously with the warm sun beating down on him.  
  
He couldn't realize how big the other kids were it was the first time he realized how small he was for his age.  
  
What are you doing here the handsome and tall brown haired one sneered at him. He looked at the blue bracelet on Alexs wrist.  
  
Alex didn't want trouble and stayed quiet.  
  
The other black haired one walked over hey the if you wanna watch you gotta sit with the girls in the bleachers.  
  
The other students within hearing range all laughed.  
  
The brown haired one went to walk by and shoved roughly into him Causing Alex to stumble.  Just then a drill instructor walked up.  
  
What's he doing here. He asked angrily he drill instructor looked quickly at Alex not my idea but he won't last long I give him a week.  
  
Everyone laughed.  
  
The next second he was laid out face down his head throbbing.  
  
He took to exploring on the weekends feeling homesick but realizing home was no where.  
  
His body was bruised and beat but they couldn't take away his gentle and caring spirit.  
  
Then when that the situations reversed  
  
You might be the only dwarf who seems to love trees as much as precious stones.  
  
  
Chapter 6  
There was no one that could stand up to him at the school maybe boar or lance they were massive both about 6 8 and thick. But his athleticism always topped anyone.  
  
The blood merchants  
  
What really stood out was how gentle and well spoken he was, and sad.  
  
What is it?  
  
Sash it's a dragon!  
  
It's small for a dragon,  
  
It's a baby  
  
Are you sure yes  
Look at it  
  
I've never seen a dragon before  
  
  
  
  
  
  
Chapter  
Alex walked into his office wife eyed, it was covered in books and strange instruments but it was cozy and comfortable. Large couches lined one of the walls.