

Tsalix Silverthorn and the Glittering Peak

Chapter 1

Tsalix blinked his eyes open. The sunlight streaming through the windows of his quarters seemed subdued. The normal brightness was shrouded and fainter somehow. There was an unnatural stillness in the palace. He climbed out of bed and crossed the floor to the window that overlooked the main road in Hayeli. The way was lined by throngs of people, all looking toward the castle. There was a knock at the door, and when he opened it a servant handed him a note written on ivory paper.

"Thank you," he said, as the man withdrew.

Tsalix unfolded the note and read it. There was another knock on the door.

"Enter," he said softly.

Kwercus and Asur entered room.

"Good morning," Tsalix said.

"At least it is morning," Kwercus said. "I'm not sure how good it is." He crossed the room and looked out the window. "The people know!"

Tsalix sat on the edge of the bed. "I wonder if this will change our mission."

"Perhaps," Asur replied. "Or at least delay our departure." He ran his hand through his unruly red hair. "I knew the king was ill, but when we left him last evening I had no thought it would be the last time we would see him."

"Nor I." Tsalix held up the note. "We have been summoned to meet with the queen. Make yourself presentable as quickly as you can."

"The queen?" Asur said. "So soon? I'd better hurry back to my room."

Tsalix shook his head and gestured toward the table next to the window. Asur poured water from a pitcher on the night stand, into a bowl and splashed it on his face. He ran a comb through his hair, trying to tame it.

"I guess I'm ready," he said.

The three headed to the throne room, down darkened and silent hallways. A guard stood at the throne room door, a black band on his arm. He gave a slight bow before he opened the door. Queen Nadlee sat on her throne, dressed in a silver-gray gown. Her face was as pale as a harvest moon. She struggled to smile at Tsalix and his friends. The three of them knelt before her.

"Rise," she said softly. "Thank you for coming so quickly."

"We are so sorry, your majesty," Tsalix said.

"Thank you. I know your feelings are sincere. But even in this time of great sorrow, there are things we must discuss.

The three sat in front of the queen.

"We live to obey," Tsalix nodded.

The queen turned in her seat and struck a small silver gong that hung next to the throne. Only a few seconds passed before her son Johona and her daughter, Angelica, entered the room and took their places on either side of her. Between mother and daughter, the empty throne bore solemn testimony to the loss of the king. Tsalix, Kwercus, and Asur rose as the two entered the room.

"Please be seated," Johona said. "Are you prepared to complete your mission?"

It was clear he was having trouble controlling his emotions.

"As you wish," replied Tsalix.

"It is more than a wish. It is crucial. Once word reaches my brother of our father's death, he will mobilize his forces in an attempt to defeat mine and become ruler of this land. This cannot be allowed to happen!"

Tsalix nodded. "But how will finishing our mission affect the battle?"

The queen put her hand on top of her son's.

"That remains to be seen." She wiped a tear that trickled down her cheek. "But my son is right. It is imperative that you reach the Scepter of Power and restore the three talismans to their rightful places." She looked at Tsalix. "You have learned many lessons on your quest. Do not forget them. They will be of great use to you."

Angelica nodded before she rose from her throne.

"You remember when you first came to Hayeli and accepted your quest, that you were given four vials that were to help you on your ways?"

The three men nodded.

Tsalix thought back to when the vial market Fire had lighted the passage and burned the door that led to Abaddon's forge room in the bowels of Mount Jinee. The second vial, Water, had helped them find the first talisman on the top of that mountain. The third, Earth, had provided a mound that blocked the stairway that led down Mount Jinee and allowed them to escape. And the fourth, Wind, had saved them from certain death in the Maelstrom of Tears, on the Sea of Tabass.

"Yes, Your Majesty," Tsalix replied.

Angelica stepped toward the three of them, reached into a velvet pouch clutched in her hand, and removed three half-inch marbles – a black one, a blue one, and a yellow one. Each was attached to a yard-long leather thong.

"Tsalix, this is for you." She handed him the black orb. "Please keep it safe until it is needed."