

“Would you like seconds?” Meranda asked Moekin used a biscuit to sop up the last of the gravy on his plate.

“No thanks, I am stuffed to the hilt. Your cooking always hits the spot.”

“Dad, tell us again how you single handedly killed that Ancient Red Dragon that was gonna eat Moekin.” Gabe asked as Meranda cleaned the table.

“So it was ancient, I thought it was a hatchling, and I seem to remember that there were three of us there” Moekin said with a chuckle.

“Well, uh...”

“Never mind about that, we were just coming to the good part”

“There we were in a clearing on the mountain just past Devil’s Peak. When we spotted that damned white hared bastard Dark Elf.” Kestel continued on.

“Now be careful what you say around the children Kestel.” Moekin said.

“Sorry, Moekin, I just get so angry about the fact that he got away.”

“It was not your fault, my old friend. He was just a sneaky fiend, the way that he led us into that trap with that dragon.”

“I know, given the chance we would have had him and his head on a pike to bring back to that poor village that he raided.”

“Never the less, the Dragon was slain, the Dark Elf did get away. But we rescued the captives and returned them to the village. With that said its way past our bedtime. Milo you need to get up early if you want to go hunting with Moekin.”

“Can I go to?” Gabe Whined.

“No, you are too small.” Snorted Milo

“Am not”

“Some day you will be big enough to go.” Moekin stated to Gabe with a wink.

The day dawned with a slight drizzle and the fresh smell of spring. Milo rushed into Moekin’s room and kicked him in the leg, waking him up.

“Come on Moekin, are we gonna sleep all day or go hunting.”

Moekin then suddenly reached out of the nap sack and tripped Milo, sending him crashing to the ground with a thud.

“Just waiting for you”, Moekin said as he crawled out of the nap sack fully armored.

“Do you always sleep with your armor on?” Milo said with a cross look on his face.

“No, I’ve been up for three hours. A Ranger doesn’t have the luxury of sleeping in. Besides the fact I am still used to taking watches in the middle of the night.”

“Come on let’s get outside so we can string our bows and prepare for the hunt.”

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As Milo and Moekin were finishing stringing the bows, the door squeaked open as Meranda walked out.

“Are you boys sure you don’t want breakfast.”

“No, we need to get on the trails quickly.” Moekin stated as he slung his bow over his shoulder.

“You boys be careful. Milo, be sure that you pay attention to Moekin.”

“I will. We should be back by suppertime. Love you mom.” Milo said as the two headed off in to the woods.

Gabe hurries past Meranda and shouts, “Be back for lunch mom, gonna go play with my friends.”

Meranda sighed, “Ah, a quiet morning. I might be able to get something done today.”

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“So, Milo who was that girl that tripped you up yesterday?” Moekin said with a chuckle.

“No one”

“Come on Milo, I know love when I see it. You forget who you are talking to.”

“Oh, don’t start with that love stuff. Gabe is always teasing me about that.”

A rabbit crashed through the under brush. Moekin quickly drew back the bow and let loose an arrow that flew just over the rabbit's head. A second arrow flew past Moekin's side and hit the rabbit pinning it to the ground.

“See I can keep up with you. I can even out shoot you.”

“I was just testing you, I wanted to see if you could back me up in a hunt, or a fight”

“Yea right... at least now you know I can”

“Getting back to this girl...”

“O.K. O.K, so I like her”

“*Like*”

“I like her a lot O.K”

“What's her name?”

“Her name is Kimberly, the healer's daughter.”

“Oh Kenneth's daughter, you know that he, your dad and I did some traveling together”

“Oh no, just as long as you guys don't start the adventure stories at my wedding”

“Your what?”

“Uh . . . Well, Moekin I... I want her to marry me. I can't get her out of my mind. I wake up thinking about her. Almost every minute I am thinking about her, and hearing her sweet voice in my head. Makes it to where I can't concentrate sometimes.”

“Yep sounds like love.”

“Yes it is. I love her.”

“Does she know how you feel?”

“Yes we have slipped off into the woods a few times for picnics. I think that mom knows about it too. She actually packed two meals into my pack one time.”

“Can’t sneak anything past your mom. I remember one time I tried to sneak your dad back into the house after a long night ‘hunting’. We were actually in the pub in Briarwood. The next day she was fit to be tied. Nearly ended your dad’s and mine adventuring days right then and there.”

“One of these days Moekin, I would like to go on an adventure with you. Slaying Dragons, saving damsels in distress” Milo said as he struck a fighting pose.

“Living out under the sun and stars, no body to tell me what to do, going into pubs...”

“Now, now Milo, don’t get ahead of your self. It is not all fun and games. There is real danger out there. These are not fairy tale stories. Your dad and I have spent many years together training and fighting side by side. One of these days when your dad and I think you are ready I will take you on a small adventure.”

“But I am ready now. You and I train together”

“Yes, but we haven’t trained enough together. I will set up a little practice area in your yard this week and teach you how to use that sword properly. I might even ask your dad if he would show you how to use his crossbow. I can already see that you can use a bow. Almost as good as I”

“Well, let’s head back. It is almost dark. And you told your mother we would be back for dinner. I want to be back so there is enough time to give her the rabbit you killed, so she can cook it. Your mom makes the best rabbit stew.”

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As Moekin and Milo headed back towards home a light haze filled the forest.

“Do you smell smoke?” Milo asked with a little tension in his voice.

“I sure do”

“I hope the forest is not on fire”

“The village is burning” a small voice said from above the two.

Moekin looked up to see Gabe jump down from a branch.

“What are you doing here?” Milo asked.

“He always follows us into the woods. One of these days I will teach you how to tell if someone is following you.”

The three started to run straight towards the village crashing through underbrush and around trees, ignoring the windy path.

They crashed through the last line of trees. The sight that greeted them was one of fire and chaos. The village had been attacked and destroyed.

“Boys get to your house, Milo get your father and tell him to meet me by the well. I am gonna take a quick look around and see if the bandits are still here.”

“O.K . . . O.K I will.”
