

A TALE

BY ALINA UDREA

Vol II



A Tale: Volume 2

By Alina Udrea

NOTE: This is a sequel to my first novel entitled simply “A Tale”. The story follows the adventures of the main characters in the first volume, getting the reader to know them even better. The first volume is free and it was published on www.free-ebooks.net. I hope you will enjoy.

Also this is dedicated to my family, my husband Marcel and my daughter Delia whom I love dearly. And of course to my best friends whom I was lucky to “meet” while playing Celtic Heroes on my phone. Nevertheless, it is a fiction and everybody should take it as it is, a figment of my imagination. Cheers!

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Chapter 1: From cook to warrior

After Gelebron' s defeat and Miihah' s return, all was quiet in the beautiful and peaceful land of Donn. But as nothing good lasts too long, this state of blissfulness wasn't to last long either. Threat was lurking from the Northern regions, a land called Loyalis which was ruled by king Dova the Ruthless and his right hand man, his army' s general, a man as ruthless as himself but with less brains, Jerno.

Meanwhile Scar and Miihah were ruling the kingdom with fairness and generosity. Scar had learnt from Miihah what true kindness was and what it meant to be generous with the less fortunate. They were surrounded by their loyal friends, Ulo, Mongo, Bratty, Mean, Harry and their newest friend Alyss the archer, or Deadly Arrows as she was known to her enemies. Their friendship was beyond borders, each of them fully trusting the others without a second thought. They used to meet all at least once a day, usually having dinner and drinking together in the local tavern where they talked about what had happened during the day. This is how one evening Adi the cook had come into discussion.

- Remember Adi? He wants to become a warrior, he said he has nothing to lose, just his life, ha-ha. Said Mongo, thinking with admiration of the brave cook who had accompanied them to Gelebron's tower.
- Yes, he has been training every day with my soldiers, answered Harry playing with his grey beard. He was so skinny and had no strength at all at the beginning, he could hardly pick up the training sword and he used to trip a few times before actually hitting the training dummy!! Ha- ha, such a funny guy!

- Is he any better now? He really wanted to accompany us next time we would go on a mission. He said he'd cook for us and also fight with us, such a courageous young man! Said Mongo curious to find out what Harry thought of the cook.
- Yes, finally Adi got some muscles on him now. I think he will make a fine warrior. The more we are, the merrier! Laughed Harry.
- Yes, I liked it when he put the frying pan in front of Harry, saving him from the snake's poisonous venom. He is a natural! Alyss also agreed.
- I guess he can come, we need a good cook anyway! And if he's willing to fight by our side, even better, Ulo also agreed with the rest, taking a gulp of ale and looking outside the window at some children playing in the dirt, pretending to be knights and fighting with some sticks.
- Speaking of the devil! Said Harry looking at the front door of the tavern as Adi had just walked in. Come join us Adi!

Adi, not sure the king's general, Harry the Dwarf, was talking to him, turned his head to see who he was talking to but there was nobody else behind him.

-Who, me? Asked Ady coyly, his cheeks turning red. Even the tip of his nose was red.

-Yeah, you! Come here boy! Have a drink with us! And Harry ordered another round of ale for everybody, including Adi. Adi on the other hand had never tasted ale before, he had come to the tavern looking for Blaryn, his older brother. But as he wanted them to believe that he was used to drinking which in his opinion was a must to be considered a real man, he accepted Harry's invitation and sat by their table.

- Don't be afraid, the ale won't bite you!! Laughed Bratty who immediately realized the truth. On the other hand, maybe the cockroach on the rim of the glass will!

-Yuck! And he dropped the glass on the floor, all the ale spreading under the table to everybody's amusement and to his joy as he didn't have to drink from the reeking liquid anymore.

-Want me to order you another drink? Asked Harry patting him on the shoulder.

-No, please don't bother. I got a stomach ache and can't drink today, Adi lied.

-Ok Adi, if you say so...and Harry gave up on trying to get Adi a drink.

Mean whispered in Bratty's ear, asking her if there really had been a bug in Adi's glass.

-Nah, but did you see the poor guy? I thought of doing him a favor, answered Bratty, giggling.

- I thought so, answered Mean with a grin.

- So how is your training Adi? Asked Mongo.

- Pretty good I reckon. I've been training every day since our adventure together so next time if you would consider taking me along I could be of more help than just cook...and would fight with a sword, not a frying pan... Adi was looking searchingly in their eyes trying to figure out what they thought of him, trying to read their minds by the expression on their faces.

- Yes, Ulo mingled in the discussion, we've heard that you have become pretty good at wielding the sword! So I think I am not wrong when I say that you are most welcome to join us from now on!

- Wow, I don't know what to say. I am honored by your words and I promise I will do my best to earn your trust and my place among you!

- Amen to that! Said Mean who really liked the kid.

Chapter 2: Loyalis

- Hey, Jerno, get your ass in here! Yelled Dova, the king of the northern lands called Loyalis.

Loyalis was a magnificent land, lush with forests and mountains and rivers filled with different types of fish, a land with good soil that gave every year good crops but unfortunately with one itsy bitsy drawback: it was inhabited. By people. By King Dova's people, a nation of ruthless mercenaries who would have killed their own mothers if there was to be had any money out of it. Dova was surrounded by an army of mindless and merciless mercenaries who were ready to do anything for him as long as they got paid for it. His general Jerno had two brothers, Og and Bris who were both assigned with keeping the army under control, making sure the soldiers, the mercenaries, were paid in time for their services and also reporting directly to Jerno if they got wind of any discontents that were threatening to turn to riots. Those would have to be dealt with swiftly. No disobedience was to be accepted.

-Yes, your lordship?

- Is your dragon ready? Is it trained and obedient? And Dova looked straight in Jerno's eyes with such menace that Jerno was afraid to tell him anything else but what Dova the Ruthless wanted to hear. King Dova also had the nickname of Dova the Mad but nobody dared to call him that to his face. His nickname was due to the fact that that when he got mad, which happened a lot and for no real reason, he would usually maim the person he got mad at, watching him suffer, giving him a token of his royal “love”. Dova was a self-proclaimed king. He had conquered Loyalis long ago with his army of mercenaries, killing the former

king and queen who had been good to their people and forcing the remaining people of the land, who were mainly peasants with no means to defend themselves, into slavery with the help of the same mercenaries he had paid to conquer this beautiful land in the first place. His army needed supplies so the people were compelled to work the land and grow crops to feed Dova's army, being allowed to keep for themselves just enough to survive so they wouldn't die of hunger. So the people hated him and no one could say he was loved by his army of mercenaries either, but as long as he fed and paid them, he was sure he could rely on them.

- Aggy is a strong-headed dragon your lordship, but it shouldn't be long now till I break his will, said Jerno trembling with fear as he didn't know in what mood Dova was and hoping that by the end of their conversation he would be intact, all his limbs where they were supposed to be.

- It better be so or if not I was thinking of making myself a new necklace with one of your fingers hanging from it....

- Yeah, and I know which one, whispered Jerno to himself.

-What was that? Did you say something Jerno?

- No your lordship. Aggy will be ready. You will be able to use it to burn down Donn and conquer it by the end of winter.

- I hope you are right. No more stalling, go and do your job now!

Jerno left in a hurry not looking back. He went straight to Aggy's pen to check on the dragon.

Aggy was pretending to be asleep, paying attention to Jerno's footsteps and guessing he was coming to him in another attempt to tame him. He would show him when he would be older and stronger. As for now, he had to comply with his jailor's demands.

Aggy was a fire dragon. He had been found by Dova on one of his hunting expeditions when he was just a defenseless cub. He had gone to explore the surroundings of the cave he was sharing with his mother, a magnificent but old dragon who was probably dead by now. How he missed his mother! And a tear ran down

Aggy's cheek. Now he was locked up in this pen with this human who kept trying to make him spit fire and hit specific targets. Maybe he should just set the human on fire, at least it would be funny even if he would be the only one laughing. But he couldn't, if he tried there were a lot more puny humans to shackle him and he didn't want that. So best thing was to do what the human asked him, at least for now.

Jerno entered Aggy's pen holding a whip in his right hand. The whip nevertheless was just for show, he never dared to use it on the dragon. But now there was something new in Jerno's eyes, it was determination to get what he wanted. Aggy realized he had better set fire to whatever Jerno wanted so he would leave him alone afterwards. He didn't want to put the human's nerves to the test this time.

- You dumb creature! Jerno said, taking revenge on Aggy for the way he had been treated and threatened by Dova. You will burn that tree and you will do it now! And Jerno pointed the whip towards a distant tree. Aggy focused his inner fire and burnt down the tree in a jiffy.
- Good, now we're getting somewhere! Said Jerno satisfied. Till winter you will be strong enough to burn more than just a tree!

Then he left to check on his two younger brothers, Og and Bris. He found them playing dice with a few of the mercenaries and drinking something which was supposed to be ale but stank really bad. Or did they stink and not the beer? He didn't really want to find out the answer to that question and as everything seemed under control he retired to his room.

Chapter 3: Bad news

Olekson the dwarf, Harry's brother, was running along the castle halls towards the throne room. He was accompanied by two slender women. They all barged into the throne room out of breath. Cold sweat was running down Olekson's face while the women kept calm.

-What's the meaning of all these? Asked Scar, the king of Donn. What's wrong Olek?

Olekson knelt in front of the courtroom and in front of the king and queen and spoke loud so every soul in the chamber would hear him clearly:

- Your Highness, forgive my interruption but I bring news from the Northern borders. Finally my scouts have returned with news, bad news I'm afraid. Speak out Sneak, Davyn! He said addressing the slender women who were by his side.
- Your Highness, said Sneak, Olekson's scout, the best spy he had, we have just returned from Loyalis bearing bad news I'm afraid. King Dova is preparing his army of mercenaries to attack Donn and he also has a powerful weapon. He has a dragon, a fire dragon, last of his kind. He is preparing an attack by the end of the year.

Sneak and Davyn bowed and retreated behind Olekson who spoke again:

-My king, we have to take some measures against that dragon in the first place. Our army can most probably defeat Dova's mercenaries as they only fight for money, whereas our army will be fighting to defend their loved ones, their families, their homes, their children and wives. But the dragon is another matter. I think you should ask for Mean's

advice, maybe he has some information on how to defeat a dragon in one of his many old books.

-Ok, thank you Olek, Sneak and Davyn. You may go now. Mongo, please bring Mean here. Tell him it's urgent!

-Sure thing my king! And Mongo was already out the door. He was back with Mean in less than five minutes. Mean wasn't very happy as he had been interrupted and summoned by the king on such a perfect afternoon when all he wanted was to study his books of spells and try brew some new potions. Having such elixirs could prove useful in many situations. He was working on an elixir that boosted speed and strength when Mongo came in and took him to see the king without telling him anything else besides the fact that it was urgent.

- Mean, said Scar, I want you to find out anything you can about fire dragons!

-Forgive my rudeness, but are you thinking of taking one as a pet? Maybe you should find something less dangerous...said Mean half jokingly half serious as he didn't know what the fuss was all about and how had a dragon come into discussion.

-Sometimes I wonder if you are trying to annoy me on purpose Mean! Why would I want a dragon? No, I received news from the Northern borders. It seems king Dova the Ruthless wants to conquer our land and he has a dragon to aid him. Any idea how we can defeat that?

- I will search for some information in my books. There must be at least one holding the information we seek. I will let you know as soon as I find out anything useful my king! And Mean bowed and exited in a hurry, obviously worried at the king's words.

Then Scar and Miih retired to their room as Scar wasn't in the mood to do anything else for the time being.

Mean hurried back to his books to find something useful on fire breathing dragons. He took all the books from the shelves and scanned them for the information he needed but he couldn't find anything on the subject. Then he remembered he had a few more books in a drawer which he hadn't opened in ages. He hoped he would find what he was

looking for in one of those forgotten books. They were as ancient as time itself so if he was going to find out anything about an ancient creature as a fire dragon then those were the right books. They had to be. He started scanning the first book keeping his fingers crossed. Barely had he scanned a few pages when there it was: a picture of a fire dragon and some information about it! He was so thrilled that he almost dropped the book in the excitement. He read everything about it and went back to pass the information to the king. He was informed that the king and queen had retired to their room so he wasn't sure if he should bother them now or wait till tomorrow. After a few minutes of pondering he decided he had better inform the king of his findings right away.

There were two guards at the king's chamber. They had been ordered to make sure nobody would disturb the king for the rest of the evening but Mean was determined to talk to Scar.

- Hello, I'm here to see the king! Said Mean in a determined voice. It is important that I see him now, I have urgent matters to discuss.
- No one is allowed to disturb him for the rest of the day. Scar made it clear, we are sorry, one of the two guards answered bored.
- Is that so? And Mean put them under a sleeping spell. Both guards started snoring right away, leaning against the wall in an awkward position. Then he knocked on the door and entered.
- What is the meaning of this? Roared Scar. I asked not to be disturbed today. Where are the two guards?
- Asleep for now, but it is not their fault. You wanted me to find out anything I could about fire dragons. Well I have and that is why I had to see you.
- Hmm, if you entered then you might as well speak. Ok, what did you find Mean? Asked Scar impatiently.
- This is what I found: fire dragons can be tamed and made to accept the person who manages to put the Fire Necklace around

their neck. That person automatically becomes the fire dragon's master and the dragon will protect his master for as long as his master lives. There will be created a special bond between the dragon and his master, they will be able to even communicate telepathically. The dragon will feel if his master is in danger even if they are worlds apart. And the other way around, the master will feel any pain the dragon feels. It is a bond for life. Now comes the tricky part: retrieving the Fire Necklace from the most dangerous mountain in Donn, the Shale Mountain. It is a ragged mountain and the necklace is said to be in a cave hidden somewhere on that mountain. The book also says that only the person meant to tame the dragon will be able to take the necklace off the pedestal. If someone else touches it, then the necklace will summon fire imps to protect itself. On the other hand when the person meant to have it will touch it, the necklace will shine in that person's hands. So Scar, do you know anyone who would like to tame the dragon? Asked Mean curious to what Scar would have to say after having heard him.

- Oh, wow. I know quite a few brave men and women who might give it a try. I will send Mongo, Ulo, Harry, Alyss and of course the newest warrior, Adi. One of them must be able to tame the dragon. They are the bravest in the kingdom, so if that dragon is to be tamed, then it will surely be by one of them! You and Bratty will stay here in case they don't return with the Fire Necklace in time and Dova should attack Donn before they get back. Donn will need you both!
- Ok. I hope they will be successful. I will give them an old map which I also found in the book to guide them. Good night my queen, and he bowed to Miihah. Good night Scar! And Mean left. When he exited he snapped his fingers for the two sleeping guards to come back to their senses.

Chapter 4: Towards Shale Mountain

Our friends Mongo, Ulo, Harry, Adi and Alyss were discussing the information about the fire dragon, the Fire Necklace and joking about who would be taming the ancient beast, becoming its master. They started preparing for the long journey ahead, taking their best armors and sharpening their weapons. They took food and water supplies and of course the best horses from the king's stables. Then when everything was ready, they started their journey towards the unknown, towards Shale Mountain and towards the mysterious cave which contained the ancient artefact, the Fire Necklace.

When night came they decided to hurry and take shelter in a small cave they saw on the map given to them by Mean before leaving. They found it easily with the help of the map which Alyss held. She had been entrusted with keeping the map and reading it. They all hurried inside as it was already dark.

-I bet the dragon will choose me as his master, said Ulo. I can disarm any traps that might be protecting the fire necklace and so the dragon will be my pet!

-If I understood things right, said Alyss who always paid attention to details, it is not just about disarming the traps. The necklace feels if the person meant to be the dragon's master touched it or someone else so you may be able to disarm the traps to get to the necklace, but if you are not the right person, then the moment you touch the necklace it will summon fire imps not to worship you but to kill you!

-Imps hah! Said Harry. We are the best in the kingdom, we can deal with the vile creatures. We will all try in turns and meanwhile we will just have to kill all the imps until finally the right person takes the necklace. So just keep your armors shiny and your weapons sharpened my friends! We have a long road ahead of us until we reach Shale

Mountain. And I bet on all the hairs of my beard that it won't be a joy ride!

Adi took out his new sword from the scabbard and examined it. He was so glad he could accompany the others on such an important mission. He would fight valiantly with his sword which he cherished dearly as it had been given to him by the king, by Scar himself as a token of his appreciation for having been a part of the group who had brought back his bride. He was so proud of himself. He had become a warrior, he who had been a cook and had only dreamt of becoming a warrior. Now with this adventure he was sure he would have plenty of opportunities to put the blade of his sword to work. He started imagining how he would strike down imp after imp when Mongo brought him back to reality.

-Adi, maybe you could cook for us? I think I am not wrong when I say we are all starving!

Mongo's words brought Adi back to the present in second. He wasn't embarrassed, he knew he could cook for his friends and still be the warrior he dreamt after they all had their bellies filled. So he put his sword aside for the moment and started doing what he knew best: cook.

- We will start early tomorrow morning, said Harry. So let's eat and have some sleep. As this cave is a small one and we've searched every corner for possible perils and have found none I guess we can all rest without having to stand watch.
- Especially as the cave is so well hidden behind these berry bushes and surely nobody knows about its existence. If we didn't have Mean's old and dusty map we would have passed right next to it without having noticed it, added Alyss calmly.
- Yep, said Ulo with his mouth full, chewing a roasted rabbit leg. Are you going to eat that Alyss? And he pointed to a piece of bread which Alyss had left as she was full.
- No, you can have it Ulo. And she gave him the bread which he took bowing his head. Alright, good night and sleep tight! Saying

that Alyss was first to lie down on an improvised bed made of dead leaves. Soon everybody else followed her and they were all fast asleep.

When the first warm rays of the morning sun touched the entrance to the cave the camp fire had already died out long ago and they were all shivering with cold. The blankets they had, had kept them warm enough as long as the fire had been burning but when it died out the blankets weren't enough to keep them warm anymore. So everybody was glad that the sun was finally up, warming the inside of the small cave that had served them as shelter during the night.

After having breakfast, they gathered their things and prepared for the road again.

- It looks like we will have to go through the Murky Forest, said Alyss. I heard that it is almost always foggy and filled with swamps and quick sands. The swamps are said to be crawling with swamp sharks, some slimy creatures that look like some overgrown snakes with razor teeth and sharp scales. They are as deadly as my arrows! And there are also swarms of blood flies as big as pigeons which attack only at dusk when the sun is about to set. They have long tails with venom in the tip of them with which they sting their victims, paralyzing them. And as if these weren't enough the Murky Forest is also full of quick sands as I have just told you. I heard a story of an old man who drowned in one of these quick sands together with his horse and cart. We will have to be very careful until we reach the end of the Murky Forest because it is a place which reeks of death from every corner. Saying that, Alyss put her magic quiver on her back and her bow in its place and stretched her aching bones as she hadn't slept well.

Chapter 5: Through the Murky Forest

Two hours later our heroes were entering the Murky Forest. Adi was very nervous as a thick fog enveloped everything around them and he didn't like it at all. He liked to see his foes and the possible dangers. He put his hand on his sword ready to draw it from the scabbard if he felt there was anything wrong. He could feel goose bumps. It wasn't fear what he was feeling but rather a strong wish and will to live, to survive no matter what he would have to face. He just wished he wouldn't disappoint his new friends. He would protect them with his life if he had to. He was finally a part of a team, he wasn't just their cook, he was also their friend. And let's not forget he was also a warrior now...

Ulo took out his tiny bottle and took a quick sip. Then he looked around trying to make out the path but the mist was so thick that he couldn't distinguish anything. He fumbled his way and he got a bit further than the rest of the group. He soon realized he was alone. He had gotten too far from the others and he couldn't make out anything in the damn fog! He was just about to call their names when he stepped into quick sand. He panicked and he cried for the others but no one answered him which only made him panic even more. He felt the ground beneath engulfing him so fast that he was sure he would die. The sand got to his knees in less than a minute and he couldn't reach anything to try to get out. He saw a thick root from an old oak which was half above the ground and had a part of it near the edge of the quick sand. If he could only reach it and pull himself out... If he survived this he swore to himself he would never put another drop of alcohol in his mouth for as long as he lived! He started struggling which only made things worse as the sand got to his waist. He tried again to reach for the tree root but in vain, he couldn't grab it. The sand got to his neck in a few more minutes. He was sure that was the end for him when he

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