

# The legend of the ring

## Vol. 3

### Chapter 1

Igor was cursing the day he had missed the opportunity to at least try and take the ring away from Angela. He had given up without a fight which was pretty pathetic and unforgivable. Now the old King had died and Daniel was the ruler of Green Valley. And what was even worse was that Angela was his Queen, his wife, which meant that she had just as much respect and protection as Daniel himself. Now things were a lot more difficult. He wished he hadn't been such a coward. But as there was no point in crying over spilled milk, he decided to go back to his citadel and ask for Margo's advice. He just hoped she wouldn't mock him, but he knew better. She was an old crow and she never missed an opportunity to mock him. But even so, he needed the old hag. That was why she did what she did. She too, knew that he was lost without her magic and advice. And she enjoyed every moment of it. Sometimes he thought she was pure evil. He couldn't stand her and her stench but he couldn't live without her, either. He kept telling himself that

she was a necessary evil. It was best to have her by his side than on the enemy's side, that was for sure.

Igor had been away from his people for a year during which he had tried to infiltrate in Daniel's castle in vain. He couldn't delay his return anymore. He was wondering if his people were still there, waiting for him. He hadn't known that he'd be away for so long. He had left Margo in charge of everything before leaving, even his money. Someone had to pay his little army while he was away. And as much as he didn't like her, he trusted her. She'd been by his side since forever.

He was so broken to pieces that he felt he had to be glued together not to fall apart. He needed a new plan now. He couldn't just barge in the castle, not alone anyway. But he decided to try to keep his wits together and search his brain for something else. It was the best thing he could do. But first he had to return to his people, to Margo.

When he finally arrived, he was content to see that his people were still there, greeting him, happy of his return. By the way they looked, it was obvious that Margo had done a good job and that she had paid them while he had been away. There were some soldiers guarding his citadel who seemed surprised of his return but glad at the same time. They greeted him with due respect and he didn't sense any mockery in their attitude which took a bit from his sorrow of having failed. It didn't really matter as long as he still had his people and of course, Margo.

He entered the citadel and headed straight for Margo's tower. He could almost hear her hissing already. He climbed the steps to her chamber in a jiffy and entered without knocking. Margo was mixing some brews at her working table, which by the way, were smelling horrible. She was obviously working on some new spell, some new incantation. When he entered, she didn't even have to turn around to know it was him. She knew as she addressed him while she was still mixing in the boiling brew, with her back against the door, not being able to see him. "Sssoo, my Prince, you failed.... You couldn't take the ring.... from a girl...", she said, blame in her voice, but not mockery. He could deal with that, he thought.

"Yeah... I was a fool, I shouldn't have missed my opportunity, I should have tried while I had the chance. But it's too late for that now. She is Queen now and Daniel is the King of Green Valley. Things are a bit more complicated now, but not impossible I hope. Maybe with your help, Margo, I could... "

"So you were, my Prince, so you were... but don't fret, there will be other chances, you just have to be patient." Then Margo went on with mixing her potions and Igor knew that was all she was going to say for now. She was disappointed but he was just as disappointed with himself so there was no point in being bitter about it anymore. He left her there as he found her and went to his room which was pretty clean, to his amazement. She must have paid someone to keep it clean for his return as she surely hadn't cleaned it herself. He was dead tired and all

he wished for now was to have a good night's rest. He took a cold shower and then he fell into a deep slumber.

On the following morning, Igor felt refreshed. He was glad to be among his people again. He ordered his generals to get him a list of his troops and of the provisions they still had. He had to see the numbers with his own eyes, to see exactly how many people he could count on when the time came for battle.

Because the more he thought about it, the more convinced he was there was no other way. He couldn't just filch that darn ring so he would have to rely on his men, on his army. He couldn't delay the attack much longer as he was sure the barn and silo were depleting every day. He couldn't wait until there was nothing left. He was well aware that no army would fight on an empty belly. So the final battle should be soon, while he still had enough provisions to feed his men.

When Morris, his general, brought him the list he had required, Igor could see that his hands were trembling and he knew that whatever he would read on that list was not going to please him. Morris almost dropped the list when he handed it to him, then he coughed trying to appear as though that had been the cause for his almost dropping it. But his anxiety was evident. Finally, Igor almost snatched the list from Morris' hands and then he sat back on his chair examining it carefully while Morris stood still, waiting for orders which never came. Igor bit his lower lip at seeing the low numbers but didn't utter one word. Then he just said "Dismissed" while looking at Morris. He could

see relief in his big brown eyes before he turned around and left the room.

## **Chapter 2**

Angela was happy beyond words. She couldn't believe she was the Queen although more than a year had passed since her coronation and her wedding to the love of her life, Daniel. She was extremely grateful for having Rose by her side, too. She was her only friend and she had been her only friend back at the orphanage, too. They were so close that one could pass them for sisters, that's how close they were. She gave Rose access to every room of the castle except her private chamber, of course, which was her refuge, the one that she only shared with her husband. Daniel also liked her and had nothing against Angela's close friendship with Rose. And Rose appreciated her new life at the castle. There was no comparison with the poor life she used to live at the orphanage, where there was never enough food or clothes or warmth.

Since she first came to the castle, her life changed completely. She had the chance to see another side of life, a

better side. Something she would have never even dreamed of, let alone imagine she could have. She was grateful to both Angela and Daniel for letting her live under their roof, for taking her along. And she was loyal to them, to both of them. She hoped that maybe someday she could make it up, that she could maybe repay them somehow, repay their kindness. She had no idea how she was going to do that but she thought that perhaps one day she would have the opportunity to show her gratitude for their hospitality.

Rose followed Angela everywhere since they moved to the castle. Which was an obvious improvement compared to her secluded life from the orphanage. This way she got out more, enjoyed life more than before when she spent most of her time indoors. Now whenever Angela and Daniel would go hunting or visiting the surrounding estates, they would also take Rose along. And she got used to it, to accompanying them everywhere. Now, one year later, Rose was wondering how she had lived most of her life in the tiny orphanage room, barely going out. But it was all in the past now. Once with Angela's new life, a new, better and more interesting chapter in her own life also started. And she wanted to make the best of it.

So one day when Angela asked her to accompany her to the nearby woods to hunt some deer, Rose immediately said yes. But then when she realized that Daniel wasn't going to accompany them, she began having doubts as danger could be lurking even in the most friendly places. She tried to persuade

Angela that maybe it wasn't such a good idea to go without Daniel's protection, but it seemed that Daniel had gone alone this time as he had some important business in a nearby county. He was supposed to name the lords for that county and he considered it was no place for Angela and that it was boring, but it was one of his duties so he had to go. He had assured Angela it wouldn't take him more than 3 or 4 days till his return. Meanwhile, she was supposed to spend her time with Rose taking long strolls in the large garden of the castle or reading or doing whatever pleased her. But if he had known her better, he would have known that nothing pleased Angela more than spending her time in nature, among the trees, with the wind playing in her hair and the sun shining above her. Yeah, she could have just strolled in the garden, but that didn't give her the feeling of freedom that she was yearning for.

She was in the mood to hunt and enjoy a day in the woods without Daniel by her side to nag her. She still had Rose for that, however.

“What are you afraid of, Rose? I know these woods like the back of my hands. Come, it will be fun, just the two of us.... “, Angela was saying trying to ease Rose's nerves.

“That's what I'm afraid of! Just us... what if something happens? What if someone attacks us? What will Daniel say? He is relying on me to advise you and to keep you safe. How can I do that when you won't listen to me? “ exclaimed Rose,

knowing in her heart that if Angela had set her mind on something, then there was no turning back.

“Who would dare attack the Queen of Green Valley?” Angela went on with a smug look on her face.

“Exactly, Angela, just think about it. You’d make a great prize for ransom. Or maybe not all boors from Green Valley know who you are and they could just attack and try to kill us for what we have on us, for our supplies and money... “

“Let them try, Rose. Haven’t you learned anything during all these years you've known me? Don’t you know I can take care of myself and you? And let’s not forget I still have my magic ring.... “

“I still think it's a bad idea. What if a bear attacks us? Do you think it will bow before you because you are the Queen!? Danger may come from beasts too, not only from people”, said Rose still trying to make her case.

“I’ve never seen beasts more dangerous than people. Anyway, I’ve never seen any bears in these woods, so I think we are safe. “ and Angela laughed at Rose for being such a coward.

“Ok, but do you promise we'll be back before dinner? Before the other servants notice we are missing? I really don’t want to explain myself to Daniel when he returns” uttered Rose in a low pleading voice.

“What do you mean with {other servants?} You are my friend, Rose, not a servant. I hoped you knew that by now,



although I never really said the words. But you must have felt it. You are like a sister, Rose..... “, a large tear in the corner of her right eye almost rolled on her cheek. “And yeah, ok, sounds fair, we'll be back before dinner, is that good for you, Rose? “ she asked while examining her childhood friend.

“Alright, Angela. Hope nothing bad happens or I'll never forgive myself. I can't explain it, I just have a bad feeling about this” Rose said in a final try to convince Angela out of it.

“Where's your sense of adventure, Rose? When you grow old, don't you want to have some stories to tell your grandchildren? “ and Angela giggled, winking at her, as to make her think that maybe she could also find someone and marry.

“If we grow old.... If anything bad happens, we might not grow old at all, Ange.... “

“Oh shut up already and be ready in five. I'll meet you at the stables” said Angela as she stormed out of the room not wanting to hear any more complaints. Before closing the door behind her, she turned to Rose and added in the most earnest way she could muster: “and put a smile on that face Rose, or you're not going anywhere! “ and then she left for the stables.

“If it could only be that easy..... “ thought Rose still unsure about this trip in the woods.

## **Chapter 3**

Daniel was heading towards Marchmoor, a large estate in Green Valley. He was accompanied by a large part of his army as he was supposed to reconcile two enemy lords, Lord Zeno and Lord Stein, both owners of large mansions in Marchmoor and rich and both aspiring to become Lords of Marchmoor. Whoever he chose, the other would be his enemy too. So he had to handle the problem as tactfully as he could and maybe without making enemies out of either of them. He needed all support to protect Green Valley from invasions, from his uncle, Igor. He was well aware that Igor knew that him, Daniel, was now King and he was sure he would try to take that away from him. So he needed as much support as he could get, he didn't need the Lords of his kingdom to quarrel each other. He needed both Stein and Zeno. Both were influential and had many people under their command, people who with the proper training could become soldiers and fight for him.

Lots of thoughts were mingling in the back of his mind as he was riding towards Marchmoor. Good thing he was also accompanied by two of his generals and a part of his army, of course. The rest stayed at the castle to protect his wife and to ensure that everything would be ok till he returned.

Daniel was supposed to meet the two lords at Zeno's home. Stein had agreed to have the meeting there, although he wasn't particularly happy as he couldn't stop wondering why the

meeting was at Zeno's place and not at his. And of course the thought that Daniel had already chosen between the two of them crept deep into his mind and soul, eating him away from the inside. But he had plans of his own. He wouldn't just stand back and see this opportunity slip away. He was too proud for that. He hired an assassin to kidnap Daniel so he could force him to sign the papers that would make him Lord of Marchmoor. Then he would release him hoping that Daniel wouldn't hold a grudge.

The hired blade was a young orphan who had run away from the orphanage when he was 10 and had been brought up by a local band of cutthroats. He had spent his days among them, learning from them, studying them, becoming more than they ever were, becoming an assassin for whoever had the money to pay him. It never mattered to him who the target was as long as he got his money. And he always did his job and never left any evidence that could lead to him. He was smart and paid a lot of attention to details. A small detail could mean the difference between a life as a hired assassin or a life in prison. And he loved the first choice.

Devon was 23 now and very skilled in what he did. It wasn't something a normal man would have taken pride in, but he was proud. His so called family, the ones that had raised him, also started to fear him. As they were getting older and weaker, he was getting better at what he did and stronger. They had mistreated him many times from the moment they

had taken him among them because they didn't really care about him. All they cared was that Devon stole for them so they'd give him a scrap of food and shelter. They taught him that nothing came free in this world and that he had to work and fight for the little food he got from them. Sometimes when Devon thought about it, it wasn't any better from living at the orphanage. But at least now he came and left their little hiding place whenever he pleased. Nobody cared. What they did care was for him to bring them something on his return if he wanted food and a place to sleep in their little den. He always brought something, no matter how small, but he never came empty-handed.

The chief of the cutthroats, Angry Pete, was an old mercenary who did whatever he could to keep order among his men. He got his nickname because he was always angry at someone or something, always yelling or at least raising his voice. All his men feared him but now they also feared young Devon. He was as slick as a shadow and as silent as a still lake. He was covered in tattoos and one could tell he was dangerous from a distance. It was not just the tattoos, but his whole appearance and posture. That is when he wanted to be seen. When he had a job, his target didn't even get the chance to see his killer. He would just find himself sent to the other realm without knowing what hit him.

Devon was particularly good at using hidden blades and poisons. He knew how to make his own poisons, never bought

them. He always carried small vials in his pockets with all kinds of mixtures, not all deadly. But administered in the right amount, all his mixtures could kill. They were as deadly and swift in their action upon the target as himself. Swift and deadly.

Angry Pete also started to fear the little rascal. He had raised him since Devon was 10 but he knew that if Devon got a job to kill him, he would do it. Devon had no loyalties besides money. He didn't love anyone so he wasn't vulnerable. For the right amount, he would kill even the king. He was dangerous and uncontrollable . But in a way, Angry Pete thought that he had also had his share of guilt as neither he nor his men had ever shown him affection in all those years. And that obviously turned him into the person he was today. A merciless cold hearted killer, hired for money. In the deepest corners of his mind, Angry Pete wished Devon would get a difficult target and meet his match. He wished he was out of his hair as he wasn't a child anymore and he was beyond control. They hadn't really controlled him as a child as he came and left whenever he wanted and he pretty much did whatever he wanted as long as he brought them something in return for his food and shelter. But now, Devon didn't really need them anymore. Angry Pete's gang meant nothing to him as he could provide for himself regarding food and shelter now. But he chose to stick around with them. Maybe because even though they were bad company, they were still the only stable thing in his life. So when Lord Stein approached him, offering him a job, Devon

accepted in a jiffy. Stein hadn't told him everything, hadn't told him that his target was the king himself. Only told him to kidnap him and bring him to his hideout, Stein's secret place.

Daniel was accompanied by Nick, his personal bodyguard, and a large part of his army. They were heading for Zeno's estate, a beautiful secluded farmhouse in the middle of Marchmoor. They were marching peacefully and Daniel's thoughts were occupied with the image of his wife, Angela. He was wondering how long he would be detained by this business trip as he missed her already. The thought of his gorgeous wife kissing him passionately was racing in his mind as they were heading towards their goal, unaware that a pair of eyes was watching them, following them from the shadows.

Before reaching Zeno's estate, Daniel decided to let his men have some rest and food as they had been marching for hours on end and they were all tired and hungry. So they set up camp in a clearing, not very far from Zeno's place. Daniel could have pushed his men onwards but decided that it was better if they arrived there rested and with their bellies full rather than famished and exhausted. First impressions always tend to have a deep impact, and Daniel was going to look imposing and dignified before Zeno and Stein, he wanted their respect as well as their loyalty. He couldn't achieve that on an empty stomach and with his nerves to the maximum because of being tired. So best thing to do was to allow his men and himself some rest and food before they got there.

They set up camp, Daniel's tent in the middle of his men's tents, for better protection, although they weren't expecting any danger, but it was their strategy just in case. The men were already sitting by the camp fire, enjoying their meal while some of them who had already finished eating, started to sing. It was a pleasant atmosphere, they were in a general good mood, singing, eating, drinking some weak ale and just relaxing by the fire.

The sun was setting behind the distant trees, sending gloomy shadows on the ground. As it was growing dark, they decided to spend the night there and leave with the first rays of dawn. They all agreed so most of the army just went to sleep in their tents while a few stood on guard at the entrance to Daniel and Nick's tent, as Nick slept in the same tent, on a different cot of course, as he was Daniel's bodyguard.

The moon was hidden behind a thick layer of grey clouds making it almost impossible for its silver rays to reach their camp. So they were emerged almost entirely in darkness, just a few torches were lit near Daniel's tent. But the wind was blowing pretty hard so they were flickering continuously, almost extinguished at each gust of wind. When the wind got even stronger, the torches went out one by one and the soldiers on guard had to lit them again until eventually they gave up, realizing it was impossible to keep them going on such a weather.

It was well after midnight when the three guards clearly heard something like a whistle coming from behind the bushes a few meters away. They looked at each other in the darkness, hardly making out anything in that pitch darkness and decided it must have been the wind. But when a couple of minutes later the same sound was heard once more, one of them thought he had better investigate to make sure everything was ok. He went towards the bush, putting his hands in front of his face to protect himself from the wind that was getting dust into his eyes. It was dark enough so he didn't need dust in his eyes, too. He hated the weather and the fact that he was among the ones responsible for the first watch.

“John!?” , the other two guards called after the first one when a few minutes had passed and he hadn't returned. As John didn't answer, they decided to investigate.

“Pull your sword, Robin, just in case.... “ the second guard addressed the third.

“Do you think we should be worried, Henry!? I mean maybe we should wake a few more guards and all go see.... “

“Are you plain stupid, Robin? Do you want the whole garrison to mock us in the morning? John is probably taking a piss and he can't hear us cause of the wind. We can't shout for him or we'll wake the king up. So just follow me, you coward!”, said Henry, a tall lank guy, not very muscular, but with a lot of guts.



“If you say so...”, Robin answered him, still unsure if it was the safest thing to do but too scared to question Henry's decision. So Henry went ahead, Robin on his tail, just a step or two behind him.

When they got next to the bush behind which John had disappeared, Henry called him one more time in a low whisper and then went behind it, too. There was a muffled thud then just before Robin had the chance to utter a sound, he too was silenced.

A dark slim figure emerged from behind the bushes and went straight for Daniel's tent. He was walking so carefully that he didn't make the faintest sound. Then he entered the quiet tent. Ten minutes later the same figure could be seen exiting the tent, a slim burden on his right shoulder, with the shape of a body covered in a blanket. Then everything went quiet again as though nothing had happened.

The moon finally sent some feeble rays through the clouds as the clouds had become thinner and had scattered on the night sky. In the moonlight, the figure could be seen resting the body on the back of a horse and then climbing himself on the horse and galloping in a hurry towards wherever he was going.

## **Chapter 4**

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