

#### A Cold Winter - Gabe Thalion's Story pt. 4

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Winter has never been good to me. It brings back the memories of being lost in the woods, alone and hungry. This winter was not too much different with the disappearance of Nightphlox. The townspeople of Bristol had grown to be cold hearted, just like the winter breeze. They had forgotten all the good deeds and the protection the guardians provided. The Band of the Twisted Claw had turn into outcasts in the people's eyes and food became scarce. The guardians did what ever they could to help provide, unfortunately it was still not enough.

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People filled the crowded streets, as a coach with a rickety wheel barreled through the town. I made my way to the coach, 'finally some work to do' I thought. The coach came to a stop outside one of the local taverns, a well dressed nobleman stepped out and I called to him, "one farthing and I can fix that wheel for ya."

"Aye, ye could, but alas ye won't, and thou wouldst be smart not to do as much as look at it you are going to be begging me for change!" snipped the nobleman.

"I begged for nothing, I just offered my assistance."

"Well take thine ASSISTANCE elsewhere!" he stated as he moved into the tavern.

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With that, I decided to head back to camp. I could always use more sword training and I needed to exert my frustrations with nobles on something. On the way back a flash of brown caught my eye. It was a figure in long hooded cloak that was running into the woods. The figure didn't look up to any good, so I proceeded after him. Before I got too far the figure vanished leaving no trace. 'I must be seeing things.' I thought.

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"What is the meaning of this?!" Someone shouted. I spun around and saw the nobleman coming in my direction with an angry look on his face. "I told you, I neediest no help from a beggar, so now thou thinkst it be amusing to turn to thievery do ye?"

"I stole nothing from thou," I shouted back at my accuser.

"So I just am missing one farthing from mine pouch, the same coin thou didst ask for, just a coincidence then?"

"Look my word is my honor; I swearest I stole nothing from thou,"

"You watch yourself boy, I have mine eye on thee, and all thine beggar friends." The man stormed off and continued to his stage coach, and sped off out of town.

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I returned and met with Adria. "Ready for more training Gabe?"

"After that, aye!"

"After what?" Adria tossed me a staff and we began circling

"Never mind," even after the noble accused me, I was still little distracted by the figure that disappeared into the woods. There have been numerous strange thefts throughout Bristol and wanted posters; no one seemed to know too much other than the notes left behind. 'THWACK!'

"AHHHH!" Stinging pain shot threw my arm.

"Gabe, are you even paying attention to me? You could have blocked that! What is the matter with ye?" I kept the answer to myself. Adria now had an annoyed look on her face, "Come back when your head is no longer in the clouds." Rubbing my arm, I put the staff back.

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Back at the camp of the Twisted Claw I could see Thoren, Talia, Lillith and Vashta were huddled

around a small campfire. Still lost in my thoughts, I walked past, unnoticed. It was not until I heard Thoren's voice, "Ha, I'll take care of that," that I focused on what was happening around me. Thoren entered his vardo.

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From a distance, I could see Lillith and Vashta, outside Thoren's vardo. A masked man opened the door, glanced at them and walked out into the woods. It was the same man that I thought I saw earlier that day. I wouldn't let him evade me again. I quietly advanced and without a sound caught up to him not far from the Vardo. "Gabe, I know your there!"

"How is it you know me?" I answered confused.

"Let's just say we have a mutual friend. I'm sure you would like to know, I am Arthur" the figure had his back to me and never turned around. "I must go now, I have things, to do" his head turned just a bit and I saw the glow of his feline like blue eyes. With that he disappeared into the woods. I felt as if I didn't need to go after him but there was something about him I couldn't shake.

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Returning to camp, I saw Thoren walking back to the fire from the side of his vardo holding a sack. "But why did you let him go." Lillith said.

"He wasn't the thief we were after." Thoren replied. It had to be Arthur that they spoke of.

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That night I noticed something lit up the night sky near the egg. The guardians and gypsies cautiously proceeded to see what was going on. My sword in hand, I was ready for anything. As we neared the fire, we came upon a pig roasting on a spit above the average sized blaze. The animal wasn't large enough to fill all of our hungry stomachs, but then I didn't have much of an appetite to eat.

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Talia ran over to a nearby tree where a piece of parchment hung. She read it out loud for all to hear. "You give but little when you give of your possessions. It is when you give of yourself that you truly give. ~ Arthur Unknown, Here is my donation."

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A brief silence came over the night's sky; Thoren interrupted the stillness by shouting "Rest guardians, for tonight we feast." Laughter and song filled the campfire that night. I took a place by the fire and over heard Lillith and Thoren talking,

"Thoren I still don't know why you just let him go." She said.

"Because Lillith, he had work to do." Thoren said.

"What kind of work?" asked Lillith.

"Some people guard the gates at the door, Arthur guards from a distance. He's one of us."

"One of us?" My thoughts raced "Nightph..."

"Gabe," Thoren cut in "Arthur is not who you think he is."

"Are you sure?" I replied

"Yes Gabe, I am sure," said Thoren. I stood up and started to walk away in frustration.

"This is the first time that I hope your wrong, Thoren." I said as I stormed off.

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I thought this winter was like the rest, I was mistaken. Exhausted, frustrated, and little agitated, I fell into bed, 'CLANG' "OUCH!" Rubbing my head and I could feel a large lump starting to protrude. As if the day wasn't bad enough. I turned to see what I hit my head on; I found that my pillow was missing and in its place, 5 small pieces of flat steel. Attached to the steel was a note

“An intelligent man knows that the only true constant to life is change, but a wise man is the one who willingly accepts it. Take this steel and change it to your need, but remember there will come a day where it’s not just the change in steel that will need acceptance. Arthur Unknown, This is my donation.”

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## The Choice - Gabe Thalion's story part 5

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I made my way to the Draco Disciples hoping they wouldn’t see through my disguise. The dark cloak was hot in the blistering sun but it had to work. I wanted to gain information about the disappearance of my sister. I had received a special rune that would help me infiltrate unnoticed. "Gabe Thalion, please step forward" a familiar voice called out from the table adjacent from where I stood. ‘So much for a disguise’ I thought. Removing my hood I was able to see Lady Tso seated at the head of the table, surrounded by her Decuples. "I see you have shown your proven here, now what is it that you want?" I looked around and clearly alone was outnumbered "I was told you might be able to assist me with my quest, my Lady"

"And you believe I have the information you seek?" she motioned me over "Please, sit." She then motioned to her Disciples for them to leave us. The Disciples got up and regrouped across the way. "First, you tell me your story and I shall answer your questions." I proceeded to tell her about my past, with the disappearance of my sister, and what brought me to Bristol. "What would like to know?"

"Well, what is your quarrel with the Paragons? And, why so much blood shed?"

"You are aware of the stories of your Paragons, and what they did to my grandmother. They are the ones that started the bloodshed. I just want the power to share it with everyone equally, and think, if this power was distributed to everyone, maybe then your sister would never had come up missing. The Paragons keep it to their selves, you see if everyone is equal then no one will parish. If my words you do not believe, then speak with your Paragons hear their side, and meet me at the gates before nightfall. Maybe by then you will change your view on the world." I nodded and returned to the camp.

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The sun laid down over the horizon, as I approached the main gates. Lady Tso- turned to me and said "Gabe, have you talked to your ‘Paragons’? Have you made your decision?"

"Yes, I have and I do understand both sides to a point, and I have made my decision... I’ve made my decision a long time ago when your Disciples killed my parents and took my sister!" I reached for my sword. "I will never join you!"

"Fool!" Lady Tso furiously shouted.

"Gabe, stand down!" Lady Snowfire said as she and Tsume grabbed me and pulled me back.

"There are too many of them!"

"Yes Gabe, listen to your friends! And maybe you will live to see another day!" The Draco’s turned and disappeared into the crowd. My heart beating rapidly with rage I struggled to go after them, but Lady Snowfire was right, they out numbered us.

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Shortly after, a messenger gave me a letter, it read 'Gabe, I need to see you it's very important! Come quickly, Raina'

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That night I couldn't sleep. Thoughts and visions of something's not right, I had to go. I made sure everyone was out cold before I packed some supplies and gathered my horse. I rode back to UnqueDol.

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The closer I came I had broken visions of smoke and fire. It left an uneasy feeling. I rubbed my glazed eyes to see that everything seemed normal in the village. It was unusually quiet though, I knocked on the door and Raina answered.

"Gabe, you're here," sadness came over her.

"What's wrong?"

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"It's my father... he...he past away..." tears filled her eyes and I took her in my arms. "Gabe, please don't leave me there is no one left for me, here"

"What about your uncle?"

"Missing, after my father's death he disappeared. Don't leave me, again."

"Then come back with me to Bristol."

"I can't leave, this is my home, please stay."

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I heard a faint but familiar voice in the distance. "Gabe?" I looked around but saw no one. Then the vision of flames!

"Raina, did you hear that?" I made my way outside, the streets were empty, confused "It sounded like Lady Snowfire"

"No, there is no one else here, who's Lady Snowfire?"

"She is from Bristol, I don't get it" another vision of fire flashed in my head "I'm not feeling right, something's not right here" Lady Snowfire's voice was heard again, and I had another vision of her trapped behind something.

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"Come back inside Gabe, it's nothing." Visions felt like needles stabbing me in the brain. I keep seeing a magical field holding Lady Snowfire and destruction around me and back to the village being normal "AHHHHH...!"

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Opening my eyes, Village was mostly in shambles, and there was no one around. I turned to Raina, but it wasn't her. "What the hell is going on? Who are you?" Vision blurred, and then focused again, there Raina stood before me.

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"What are you talking about? It's me Raina, please come inside." I experienced a sharp pain in my head and the village looked unscathed.

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I could hear a faint whisper. "Everything is fine... do not resist... it will only make things worse for you...the pain will be over soon enough"

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A sword appeared through the haze hurling in our direction. The blade stuck into the ground near me. Raina and I looked around but saw nothing. out the corner of my eye, I noticed that Raina was chanting something, and then I see Nightphlox being slammed against a tree. "Nightphlox!

What...?" The throbbing pain in my head was terrible however; I could now see what was taking place. Raina was not Raina, a dark cloak covered her and hands had a glowing red aura and the village was in disarray. Lady Snowfire trapped by a magic field, and Nightphlox knocked unconscious. "Who are you and what have you done?!"

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"Gabe, you should have just joined us and none of this would have happened. Your precious Raina would still be alive and this village would be still standing. But I suppose I will have to kill all of you now."

"Draco Disciple! You will die!" I reached for the blade

"Gabe! Look out!" Lady Snowfire shouted. A sharp pain pierced my back. I turned merely to see the Draco clutching a bloodied dagger with a devilish smile on her face.

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"This dagger was poisoned with a special potion and you are no more, now time to take care of your friends!" Weakened, I struggle to reach my feet. I grabbed the sword in the ground and with a single movement decapitated the Draco Disciple and both of our bodies hit the ground. The last thing I saw was the spell being broken and the field holding Lady Snowfire vanished. Lady Snowfire and Nightphlox ran to my side, "Gabe! Wake Up! Gabe!" their words slowly faded away as I drifted off.

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