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# 1

## The Stranger

Sarah Collingwood took a deep breath, filled her lungs with air, and bent her body. Then she dove into the blue-green waters of the bay and kicked with her fins. The water was as warm as a bath. In front of her she could see Josh Adams swimming downward toward the reef.

*Maybe sometimes Josh is awkward on land, Sarah thought, but he's sure a great swimmer!*

The two were down ten or twelve feet now. They passed a huge school of brilliantly colored fish—red, green, yellow, orange, and more—more colors, it seemed, than in a rainbow. Then they swam by an enormous fish that Josh had told Sarah was a sea bass. He looked big enough to take off one's leg, but he hung suspended in the beautiful green water, simply fanning his fins and tail gently.

Sarah loved to scuba dive. Back in Oldworld, her parents had once taken her to the coast of Belize, where the second largest barrier reef in the world was located. As usual, when she thought of the way life was before the world had been practically destroyed by atomic warfare, it made her sad. But then she glanced at Josh, who had suddenly stopped to investigate something, and she thought, *But now I'm one of the Seven Sleepers, and I've got six good friends, and I've got Goél. I just won't think about the past.*

Goél. Since being awakened from the sleep capsules that had saved them from the atomic war, the Seven Sleepers had served Goél. He was a mysterious

but noble figure. He led an ongoing battle against the Dark Lord, who had set out to enslave Nuworld.

Josh was still looking at something. He turned toward her and gestured wildly.

She looked to where he pointed—toward the reef—and could see a shadowy shape. Shock ran along her nerves. She did not know what the shape was, but Josh was obviously alarmed. She followed him as he swiftly swam upward, his fins thrashing. When they broke the surface, he yelled, “That’s a barracuda down there! He could take a plug out of you.”

Sarah was not as afraid of barracudas as Josh seemed to be. She had never heard of a barracuda attacking a human being, although they did look vicious. “Come on, Josh! Let’s go back down and pull his tail!” she joked.

“Are you crazy?” Josh had shoved his mask back from his face and now wiped the water away. “Those things look like they’re bad tempered.”

“Well, come on. I’ll race you to shore, then.”

They swam toward the beach, and it was easy with the flippers on. Sarah did not even have to use her arms but, with legs thrashing, just drove herself forward. Since she was keeping her head high, she could see that the other Sleepers were playing volleyball on the beach. When she got close in, she pulled off her flippers and waded the rest of the way. She was careful not to step on any jellyfish, for she was very sensitive to them.

“Hey, you didn’t wait for us!” Josh called to the volleyball players. He tossed his flippers and mask onto the blanket where he had been lying earlier, getting a tan. “How do you expect to win without your star player?”

There were three players on one side: Dave Cooper, the oldest of the Sleepers, at the age of fifteen; Jake Garfield, thirteen, with short red hair; and Abigail Roberts, a blue-eyed blonde who was, in the opinion of some, the prettiest girl around.

On the other side of the net stood Bob Lee Jackson and Wash Jones. Bob Lee was never called anything but “Reb.” Although he wore only swimming trunks, he had his cowboy hat perched on top of his tow-colored hair. His light blue eyes squinted in the sun as he said, “Why don’t you all go on back and swim? We don’t need help. We’re beating these folks like a drum.”

Wash Jones was standing close to the net. He was the youngest of the Sleepers and the most cheerful. His white teeth now gleamed in his dark face as he said, “Aw, you can come and help us, Sarah. We need somebody good-looking over here to balance out us ugly folks.”

With a laugh Sarah went to Reb and Wash’s side of the net. “All right,” she said.

But Josh said, “Aw, I think I’ll just go lie down and watch you guys play.” He walked toward his blanket.

Sarah’s close friend Josh Adams was very tall for almost fifteen. She knew that he was also very shy and unsure of himself, although he tried to keep this covered up for the most part.

“Come on,” Reb yelled. “Let’s see what you all can do.”

The volleyball game went on for some time. There was a lot of laughter, and no one really cared much who won.

Finally, from the sidelines Josh called, “I vote we cook us some hamburgers.”

“Yeah!” Reb said. “That sounds good to me. You girls get to cooking!”

Abbey made a face at him. “Who died and made you king?” she said. “You can cook as well as I can!”

In the final event, the boys built the fire and set up the homemade grill. The girls made the hamburgers. Soon the burgers were sizzling, and when they were cooked, all the Sleepers sat down on the sand.

Reb Jackson put his between two slices of bread and scowled in disapproval. “Sure wish we had some real hamburger buns,” he complained. “Don’t seem like a hamburger with just putting it on bread.”

“Tastes all right to me,” Jake said. He took a huge bite, chewed, and then winked at Wash. “If Reb ever gets married, his wife will have an awful time. He demands the best of everything.”

“I’d hate to be married to *him*,” Abbey said. She was taking dainty little bites and chewing them thoroughly. The sun caught at her blonde hair, making it seem there were threads of gold in it. “He’s impossible!”

“No. I’m possible,” Reb said. “I’m so possible I can’t tell you how possible I am. As a matter of fact, I’m the most normal person I know. Everybody else is abnormal.”

Dave laughed aloud. “If you’re normal, and we’re all abnormal, then we’ll have to put you in a cage. Because when all the abnormal people outnumber the normal people, then they become normal.”

This foolishness went on until suddenly Josh glanced back toward the woods behind them and said, “Who is that? I never saw him before.”

Sarah looked. Someone was walking toward them from the trees.

“Neither did I,” Abbey said. Then her eyes nar-

rowed, and she murmured to Sarah, "But whoever he is, he sure is good-looking, isn't he?"

Sarah was not surprised that Abbey would at once analyze the newcomer as far as looks were concerned. She was slightly boy crazy and had been so ever since they had come to Nuworld. Many of their troubles had been the result of Abbey's fondness for good-looking boys.

Josh got up and walked toward the stranger. "Hello," he said. "You looking for someone?"

"I'm looking for the Seven Sleepers, and I guess you're it."

The speaker was more than six feet tall. He was young—eighteen or so. He had reddish hair and wide-spaced green eyes. He was tanned, he was indeed handsome, and he appeared to be very strong. He was wearing a pair of light tan slacks, a white shirt, and a pair of low-cut, tan half boots. "My name's Roland Winters."

"I'm Josh Adams, and this is Sarah Collingwood. This is Abbey Roberts and Dave Cooper and Jake Garfield. This tall guy here is Reb Jackson, and this is Wash Jones."

Roland Winters let his eyes run over the group as if he wasn't too pleased with what he saw. "I didn't expect you to be so young," he said.

Somehow his remark irritated Sarah, but Josh just said, "People often say that. Sorry to disappoint you. But what can we do for you?"

"Nothing." Roland Winters grinned. "It's what I can do for you."

Sarah glanced back at Josh and saw the puzzled look on his face. "What does that mean?" she asked Roland Winters. "What could you do for us?"

“Well, Goél sent me.”

At the name of Goél, everyone became more alert.

“Goél sent you?” Jake exclaimed. “For what?”

“I guess he thought you needed some help for some reason or other, so he asked me to come and meet him here. He told me a little bit about you kids.” The newcomer hesitated, then shook his head. “I’ve heard some stories about you, but I guess they were exaggerated. Kids like you couldn’t have done as much as I hear.”

The manner of Roland Winters as well as his words irritated Sarah greatly—and probably all the other Sleepers too. Good-looking and strong and able as he seemed to be, there was an arrogance about him that grated on her nerves.

“Well, if Goél sent you, I’m glad you’re here,” Josh said. “Join us and have a hamburger.”

“Don’t mind if I do.” Coolly Roland Winters picked up some bread. He put some mustard and pickle on it, and made a sandwich with the meat patty. When he took a bite, he said, “Next time maybe I’ll do the cooking for you. I can do a little bit better than this.”

“Oh, that’s just great,” Reb said with a frown. “You can do all the work you want to around here. I won’t stand in your way.”

Roland ate two hamburgers and then some cookies that Sarah had made the day before. Apparently he found the cookies not too much to his liking, either.

Sarah grumbled to Josh, “He is so unbearable!”

“Unbearable he sure is! I just hope he’s not going with us on whatever mission Goél sends us on next.”

Sarah scowled. “I’ve got a feeling that he will be.”

“What makes you think that?”

“Womanly intuition. I just feel it.”

“And I sure hope your womanly intuition isn’t right this time. In any case, he seems to be rubbing everybody the wrong way.”

After they had finished eating the hamburgers and cookies, they started the volleyball game again. Nobody was really eager to have Roland Winters on their team. So he just joined in.

He wound up standing next to Sarah.

“You just set ’em up,” Roland said, “and I’ll knock that ball right down their throats, Sarah baby!”

“I’m not a baby!”

“Aw, come on. You almost are. How old are you anyway? Twelve?”

Sarah was so furious that she could scarcely see. She refused to answer, and the game went on.

It soon became clear to her that the annoying Roland Winters had great athletic ability. He could leap higher in the air than any of them. And when he struck the ball, the sound exploded like an artillery shell. He laughed every time he drove the ball past the opponents, which he did often.

Even so, perhaps all would have been well, but then Wash lobbed the volleyball just over the net. Roland leaped high in the air and returned it with all of his strength. The ball was nothing but a blur. It struck Wash on the forehead and knocked him down. He lay flat in the sand for a minute, unable to get up.

Sarah guessed what was going to happen next. Reb Jackson had a rather quick temper, and he had become best friends with Wash. She could see the anger flare up in Reb’s face.

He ducked under the net and walked straight to Roland Winters. Without hesitation, he put a hand on the stranger’s chest and gave him a shove backward.

“You didn’t have to do that!” he said, his eyes blazing. “It’s just a game!”

Roland did not hesitate, either. He moved so quickly that Reb had no chance to stop the blow. It caught him high on the cheekbone and knocked him down.

As Reb struggled to his feet, Dave, the largest of the Seven Sleepers—almost as tall as Roland but not nearly so heavy—came over. His face was flushed. “We don’t need any bullies around here, Winters! If you’re going to pick on somebody, pick on me!”

Roland did not say a word but struck out again. His fist caught Dave in the mouth, and, although Dave did not fall, he staggered backward in the sand.

Now Sarah came running. She had no chance, of course, but she beat on Roland’s chest, shouting, “You leave them alone! Who do you think you are, anyway?”

Quickly the stranger pinioned her wrist and held her easily. “They started it!” he said. “If they’re going to start something, they’ve got to take the consequences.”

Next, Josh came up. “Turn her loose, Roland!” His face was pale. He glanced over to where Wash was helping Reb to his feet. He glanced at Dave and saw that his friend’s mouth was bleeding. “We don’t need any of this.”

“You’re just a bunch of babies. All of you. You can’t take it.”

Roland Winters turned around and stalked off down the beach. He seemed totally unconcerned about what he had done.

“What a bully!” Sarah exclaimed.

“He’s hateful!” Abbey cried. She went over to Dave and said, “Let me see.” Frowning, she studied his face. “Your mouth is cut. We’ll have to put something on it.”

As Abbey led Dave off, Sarah went to Reb. “Are you all right, Reb?”

“I reckon I’ll live.” But Reb’s pale eyes glittered, and he added, “It’s not the last of it, though.”

“Aw, come on, Reb,” Wash, the peacemaker, said. “We’re not really hurt.”

Reb did not answer. His eyes were on the form of Roland Winters, still walking away from them. “I never doubted that Goél knows what he’s doing, but if he’s really chosen *that* one to go with us, I reckon he’s made a pretty big mistake this time.”



## 2

### Roland's Choice

For the next two days the Sleepers waited impatiently for Goél to arrive. But he did not come, and there was no guessing as to when he would appear.

In the meantime, Roland Winters proved to be the most unpleasant and arrogant bully that any of the Sleepers had ever seen. Even Wash, the most even tempered and sweet-natured of all the Sleepers, grew weary of him. And it took a great deal of tact to keep Reb Jackson from jumping into another fight, for Reb had not forgotten the blow that he had taken.

One afternoon Reb and Wash were fishing off a wharf, catching silvery, torpedo-shaped fish for supper. The setting sun seemed to be sinking right into the lake. It was a huge orange disk, and Wash said he almost expected to see the water sizzle as it went down.

"Come on, Reb, you can't go around down in the mouth for the rest of your life," he said after a while. He nudged his friend with his elbow. "We'll just hope Goél has got something else for Mr. Roland Winters to do than travel with us."

"Well, *I* sure hope so," Reb muttered. "That is one no account bird if I ever saw one. He's always bullying somebody, and he'd better not try it on me again."

"Cool off! Cool off! Can't last forever. When something bad happened, my grandmother used to say, 'The Bible says it came to pass. It didn't come to *stay*. It came to *pass*.' I expect Mr. Roland Winters will pass sooner or later."

“He’d better! I couldn’t stand to be in the same space with him for very long.” Reb suddenly saw his cork go under. As always, he lost his head when he caught a fish. He yelled at the top of his lungs and pulled the fish up.

Wash looked at the catch and grinned. “That’s a mighty big yell for a mighty little fish.”

Reb took the tiny fish off the hook and then slipped it back into the water. “I can’t figure Goél out. Just can’t. We’re doing pretty well by ourselves, aren’t we? I mean, we’ve never failed him so far. Why does he have to send us ‘help’?”

“Don’t try to figure Goél out, Reb,” Wash said. “It’s a waste of time.”

When Reb and Wash left camp to go fishing, Josh brought out the swords. It was part of Goél’s training plan that they practice every day with all their weapons, including bows, swords, staves, and even knives. They had been through terrible danger too often for anyone to doubt that they might need them at any time.

Now as Josh took out the practice swords—blades blunted and with dull edges—he said, “Jake, you need to work on your swordsmanship a little bit.”

“Don’t we all?” Jake muttered. “What I need is an AK47 attack rifle.” He was impatient with primitive weapons and longed for some of the automatic arms that he had seen before Oldworld blew itself up. He picked up a sword and swished it around. “I’ll never be any good with one of these things.”

Dave wandered up and heard his remark. “Sure you will. You just have to practice, Jake. Come on. Let’s have a go at it.”

Jake was still grumbling. “Nobody in this bunch has ever beat you, Dave. Practicing with you is like playing a game you never win.”

“Well, you can invent things that I can’t.” Dave grinned at him encouragingly. His swollen lip was now back to normal. He selected a sword, and the two boys approached each other.

Though all the boys had had quite a bit of practice with blades, Jake was truly bad. On the other hand, Dave was by far the most able swordsman, even as Sarah was by far the best with a bow.

Roland came strolling up and stood with Josh, watching the practice for a while. “I can only hope we don’t meet anybody that’s got a weapon during this adventure we’re going on,” he said.

“Why would you say that?” Josh asked him. He knew that some insult was coming.

“Because unless the rest of you can handle a sword better than those two, we’re a lost cause.”

Dave stepped back, and his face reddened. “Maybe you’d like to try a bout, Roland.”

“It wouldn’t be fair, Dave. You’re just not in my class.”

“Oh? Well, maybe you’re not as good as you think you are.”

“Oh yeah? I’m as good as I think I am.”

It looked as if Dave was gritting his teeth. Then he reached for a sword and held it out to Roland Winters, hilt first. “Here. Take this, and let’s have a go at it. Let’s see how good you are.”

Roland shrugged and covered an exaggerated yawn. “Well, all right. I’ll use my left hand. That’ll give you some break.”

“No. Give it your best shot,” Dave said. “I want to see how great you really are.”

The two boys lifted their swords. Dave, clearly infuriated by the arrogance of Roland Winters, attacked at once. His sword flashed in the sunlight as he put forth his best effort.

Sarah and the other Sleepers drifted up to watch.

Josh saw at once that it was hopeless. Roland lazily parried Dave’s every thrust. From time to time he would change his sword to the other hand, and he seemed to be just as good with his left as with his right.

“Wow, he’s amphibious!” Josh breathed.

“You don’t mean amphibious. You mean ambidextrous,” Jake told him. “He can use either hand equally well.”

It was obvious that Roland was simply toying with Dave. Finally the stranger parried a blow and in a quick motion brought down his blade on Dave’s sword, near the hilt. It tore the sword from Dave’s hand.

Instantly the blunted point of Roland’s sword was right over Dave’s heart. “Well, bout’s over,” he said.

“That was real good, Roland,” Josh said reluctantly. He was very annoyed, but he had learned that he sometimes had to be peacemaker as well as leader. “You must have had a lot of practice.”

“Yes. Quite a bit.” Roland turned to him. “You want to try it, Josh?” he asked.

At once Josh knew that this was a challenge to his leadership. He also knew that he had no chance whatsoever against Roland. Still, he could not back down, so he said mildly, “I’m not as good as Dave, and I can always use some good advice. Maybe you can give me some.”

“Sure. Be glad to help you along, Josh. Come on. Let’s see what you’ve got.”

Josh was even more helpless before the flashing blade of Roland Winters than Dave had been. And since Josh was the second best swordsman among the Sleepers, it was obvious that none of them could stand up to this tall boy who cruelly laughed at their weaknesses.

“As I said,” Roland commented when their practice bout ended, “I hope we don’t meet anything dangerous on this mission. Except for me, there’s not a one who could stand up to a really bad situation.”

Sarah replied hotly, “Reb here has killed a dragon. How many dragons have you killed, Roland?”

“Never met one. But if I did, I could handle it.”

Jake said, “Well, I see there won’t be any of the rest of us bragging about anything. You do enough bragging for all of us.”

“If you can do it,” Roland said coolly, eyeing the small boy with disdain, “it’s not bragging. You all need help with any of your other weapons?”

Josh suddenly winked at Sarah. “Maybe you could show us a little bit about how to use a bow.”

“Glad to.” Roland waved his hand. “Always glad to give advice.”

The Sleepers went to the targets that had been set up, and Josh broke out the bows. “Here, Roland, you can take your pick.”

“Hm, I’ve seen better bows. I guess this one will have to do.” He strung it easily, something that was very difficult for most of the Sleepers because this was a powerful bow. He made it look so simple.

Roland Winters eyed the target. Then he notched his arrow, and he drew back the string. The motion seemed to be effortless, and Josh remembered how he himself had to struggle to draw that particular bow. He

was always just as likely to send the arrow over the trees as into the target.

Roland released the arrow, and it struck the top of the bull's-eye. He turned to Sarah with a challenging smile. "Let's see you kill a dragon, Sarah."

Sarah stepped forward. In one smooth motion she notched an arrow, drew it, and sent it flying. Before it struck, she had notched another. The first arrow hit the center of the target. Before it had stopped quivering, another was right beside it. Four more quickly followed in order. *Plunk, plunk, plunk, plunk.*

Roland gaped at the arrows clustered in a space no larger than his hand. His face grew red. He said, "Not bad."

"No. Not bad," Josh said.

Reb was grinning broadly. "You want to give Sarah a few lessons?"

"I don't need any of your smart talk! Maybe she *can* shoot, but that's not all there is to weapons." Roland turned and stalked off.

"He just can't stand to be beaten, can he?" Abbey said. "What a drip!"

Roland was still off in the grove of trees somewhere when supper time came.

Sarah said, "I don't care if he stays out there all night. He won't like anything we've cooked, anyway."

The Sleepers sat down and plunged into the meal. Actually it was really very good tonight. They had fresh fish, and Reb had insisted on making hush puppies—crisp deep-fried balls of dough. They had onions and garlic and other spices in them.

Wash said, "Mm! Mm! I think the hush puppies are better than the fish!"

“Why do they call them hush puppies, Reb?” Abbey asked curiously.

“Back home, we always had a bunch of dogs crowding around when we were trying to eat. My pap would toss one of these to them when they got too pesky and say, ‘Hush, puppy!’”

“That sounds like just another one of your tall tales, Reb.” Josh laughed at him. He liked Reb Jackson very much. “Tell us another one of your hunting lies.”

But Reb was out of the mood. He had eaten enough for two boys his size, but still there was a frown on his face. Finally he said, “I wish that Roland Winters would get lost in the woods and never come back!”

“That would be a sad thing, Reb.”

Everyone jumped to his feet, for there in the open door stood Goél!

Goél entered with a slight smile on his face. He was wearing the same light gray robe that he always wore. The hood that sometimes shaded his face was pushed back. His hair was light brown and had a slight curl to it, and his features were tanned. Sometimes his eyes seemed gray, and at other times there was a blue tinge to them. And just now his eyes seemed happy. “I’m glad to see you all. Sit down, and I’ll join you.”

“Have some of this fish—and some of Reb’s hush puppies.”

“I believe I will, Sarah.” Goél began to eat hungrily, and he listened as each one spoke.

When all had finished eating, Reb glanced around and said quietly, “Got something to talk to you about, sire.”

“And what is that, my son?”

“It’s about this guy Roland Winters. He’s impossible. Where’d you dredge him up?”

“That’s a strange expression—‘dredge him up.’ As a matter of fact, Reb, his father is one of my best servants.”

“Well, his son didn’t get any of that,” Jake said sourly. “If I ever went on a two-week canoe trip with him, I think one of us would shoot the other.”

Goél looked at Jake but said nothing.

Jake’s face turned red, and he muttered, “Well, it was just a thought.”

“So you’re all agreed that Roland is ‘impossible’?”

“He’s very difficult, sire,” Josh said. “No doubt about it. But I’m sure you knew that when you sent him to us.”

“I did indeed.” Goél leaned forward and put his hands together. He had strong hands, although the fingers were slender. He did not speak for a time but kept looking thoughtfully around the circle. “I understand your problem. He is a difficult young man. But as I indicated, his father is one of the best men that I’ve ever known. He asked me as a very special favor to see if I could do something to help his son.”

“Well, he’s a bully and a bragger,” Reb complained. “I hope you’re not intending to send him with us, Goél. Because I flat out won’t go. Not with *him*.”

Shocked silence fell over the table. None of the Seven Sleepers had ever downright refused to obey a command of Goél. But Reb’s lips tightened, and he sat up straighter. He could be stubborn, Josh knew. For a time Reb’s eyes met those of Goél, but then he could not hold Goél’s steady gaze, and he bowed his head.

“I will never force anyone to serve me, Reb,” Goél said quietly. “If you cannot serve me out of love, it is best that you go and find someone else to serve.”

Reb looked up. The words seemed to startle him. And perhaps he saw something in Goél’s face that hurt

him, for he stammered, “Well . . . well, I didn’t mean that I wouldn’t do it. I meant that . . . that I don’t *want* to do it.”

“All of us have to do things we don’t want to do, Reb.”

“Even you, Goél?”

“Yes. Even me, Reb. But I ask this of you as a favor, and it will not be a command.”

At this moment the door opened, and Roland stepped inside. He looked surprised to find Goél there, and some of his self-confident manner left him. “Well, Goél . . .” he said rather haltingly, “I’m . . . I’m glad to see you.”

“I’m truly glad to see you, Roland. Have you eaten?”

“No. Not very hungry.”

“You’d better try some of these hush puppies. Reb makes the best hush puppies that I’ve ever tasted, and the fish is delicious.”

Roland, however, turned sulky. He shook his head. “Don’t care for any.”

Goél studied the tall boy for a long moment. Then he looked around the table and said, “I’ve come to send you on a new mission, my friends. As usual, there is some danger involved, but you have never failed me, and I cannot tell you how proud I am of all of you.”

“Can you tell us anything about this mission, sire?” Josh asked.

“Also as usual, I am sending you into a situation where the Dark Lord has gained power. This time he has gained power in very high places. My heart grieves for the people involved, and I’m sure yours will as well.”

After talking about the new assignment for some time, Goél took a deep breath and stood to his feet.

“Roland, I have asked you to join with my servants the Seven Sleepers. They are some of the most faithful of all my servants. Now, I must tell you that if you go with them, you will be under the authority of Josh. I have appointed him the leader, and if you cannot obey him, then tell me so at once.”

A flush spread over Roland Winters’s face, and he glared at Josh.

Josh thought, *He thinks he ought to be the leader. I doubt that he’ll go under my authority.*

But for whatever reason, Roland finally nodded. “As you say, Goél.”

“Good. Now, we will talk of other things. Later on, I will give you a map. I think you will find that travel to the land where I am sending you this time will be much easier than some journeys in the past.”

“I wish we had a coach to ride in. Pulled by six white horses,” Abbey said dreamily.

“You will have something better than that, my daughter,” Goél promised with a smile.

Roland ate no supper, and he left almost at once.

When he was gone and Sarah had opportunity, she slipped up close to Goél. “Sire,” she said, “I don’t understand why you want that boy to go with us. He truly *is* impossible!”

“Beyond hope?” Goél suggested.

“Well . . . I don’t like to think anyone’s beyond hope, sire, but . . .”

Goél put a hand on her shoulder. “There is hope for Roland just as there is hope for you, my daughter. But there is much in him that will have to be purged away. That is the way improvement comes. Everything is burned away except the gold itself.” His grip tight-

ened on her shoulder, and he smiled as she looked up at him, not fully understanding. “I remember that you had to go through some fires yourself in order to learn. Do you recall?”

“Yes, sire. I remember. It was hard.”

“But you have been sweetened by those hard times.” His face grew serious, and he said, “Try to be a friend to Roland, Sarah. He needs a friend desperately.”

“He doesn’t *seem* to need any. He doesn’t act like he wants any!”

“But his heart is hungry. No one as arrogant and proud as Roland Winters can be truly happy. So I’m depending on you—and the rest of the Sleepers—to help him.” He added thoughtfully, “This will be a double mission. One is to help the people of the land where I will send you, and the other is to help bring Roland Winters out of what he has become so that he will be a good and a faithful servant of mine.”

Sarah sighed. “That’ll take a miracle, Goél.”

“Well,” he said, patting her shoulder, “there is precedence for that. Now, do your best, and I will expect to see this ‘miracle.’”