

Far Away

By Avenly Hansen

From Pasco High School

In her Junior (11th) Year

Librarian: Elizabeth LeCompte

Word count: 1491

Far Away

Bleary-eyed, I went downstairs for breakfast; the house was empty and even the furniture had gone. There was a deep rumble in the earth, the sound of countless hooves in restless motion. As I wiped the sleep dust from my eyes, I saw that the carts were nearly full and the sun nigh to departing time. I'd overslept.

"Mama? Papa? Nana?" My voice was hoarse with hay fever. Of all the days to fall ill, it had to be moving day. I returned upstairs to roll up my sleeping place and finish helping the others. In the moment of our departure, I looked on the ruins of the ghost town we had made our makeshift residence that season.

Since the war's uneasy end and the continued uncertainty of who would inherit the kingdom my people had spent the last several decades as nomads, wanderers without a true homestead. Obru was an ancient place; vast and unexplored, it contained many dangers. Beyond the Sea of Glass to the north was a mountain range with untapped potential and to the south were the swamp lands where monks deciphered what remained of the old Rashian people in their temples. Our current monarchy was believed to be direct descendants. Legend described them as humans bearing reptilian features having bizarre hair color, unbelievable strength, and the ability to fly with leathery wings. The only evidence to these myths was the vibrant blue hair of the royal family.

The war had been due to competition for the throne by the brothers Colus and Obin. The former, although the eldest had no heir and no stomach for true leadership but instead would pander to the Barons and other brutes with land or money. He was kind and wished to be a man of the people but his willingness to let others dictate his actions made him an unsuitable king.

Obin on the other hand already had two sons and had served as a military commander for his brother as a keeper of the peace. When Obin witnessed the injustices committed by the noblemen, which Colus ignored to maintain their favor, he challenged him. Many of the common people agreed he would be a better king. Sides were chosen and the country was thrown into turmoil.

My family's lifestyle is the result of a war-torn country. It was better to live on the move than to allow your home to become a battlefield. At least that was the philosophy I'd been raised to believe. The massive trail of dust rose to incredible heights, but not quite so high as the cheery voices of all our friends.

"There is a green hill far away with no city walls..."

The tune was old but sacred to our travels; it spoke of a hopeful place.

"... near mountains high and valley low to every soul it calls.

"A clear cool river runs right by and flowers in a meadow sigh

"And every creature sings this song: this is our home where we belong.

"So, march we on through all the way to that green hill far away"

Although the song depicted a place to call home it was nothing but a fairy tale to pass the time for these people. I doubted any of them would ever really go looking for a green hill to call their own. We sometimes would pass through real villages for a brief time, and many of our clan were trained as performers. Dancers, singers, puppeteers, and acrobats, players and fighters too. Everyone was good at something and we all worked to support one another. Where we could not earn coin we would barter with fashioned goods. It was not a terrible way to live. I was

adventurous enough to enjoy seeing all the places as we journeyed through the country's inhabited center region. Nonetheless I'd met too many people to not envy them their stability.

"Jera? Are you alright? You've been quiet all morning. Is the honey helping your throat? Do you need water?" My mama, called Othala is a very loving woman who wished to bear every burden so that I would not have to. She herself is frail and I often wish she was able to have more children than just me, her rapid-fire concern often became overwhelming. Nana twiddled happily all the while ancient enough to have returned to the carefree state of a child.

"I am fine Mama, thank you"

Not for the first time, I was thinking about the unavoidable and impending reality in my near future: I was very close to marrying age, only I wasn't as keen on the idea as my parents. My papa, called Kenaz was a very prominent figure among our group of travelers and had no thoughts of abandoning them anytime soon, no thoughts of settlement. I was far too intimidated to dare ask for such things. He would expect me to marry the Kellen's eldest son as good friends to our family. However, Alder was arrogant about this and never failed to comment on the new duties I would have as his espoused. I had become excellent in swordplay and hand to hand sparring just for the sheer pleasure of wiping the sneer off his face. Because I knew I could not accept that future and I was not brave enough to ask for an alternative I contemplated the merits of running away. As fate would have it, an opportunity to solve my problem came within a fortnight of my birthday in a town very near Obru's capital city.

The king's sons were nearing the age at which they could ascend the throne. Because King Obin himself did not achieve the kingdom by birthright neither would his sons. The two sons Eldin and Yune would be subject to three trials to determine their worth. The king's first

challenge was completed in the previous year, a test of intellect the younger prince had won. The newest challenge would be a test of leadership and resourcefulness. They were each to lead a new settlement and establish a prosperous town, one in the northern mountains and the other in the southern marshes. Eldin, well known as a great fighter was currently in city through which we were passing recruiting tradesman along with former war refugees and travelers to join him. He was also auditioning a protection detail for the settlers. This was my chance. My chance to find the green hill far away.

...

"Papa, please. I could help those people! The ones who were not safe as we, because they were bound to a home that doesn't exist anymore!"

"Your duties lie here and your people are your home."

"I thought we are one people in all the world?" I tried to press my point with his old saying. Quietly I added "I want a home of walls and a life of familiarity beyond faces." He looked at me then closely and considerately as a father does.

"Jera, audition if you wish. That much I can allow"

"And when I succeed?" I answered with new confidence.

"If you succeed... we will negotiate the terms of your leaving home."

I rushed forward in triumph and embraced him tightly. "Thank you, Papa" I spoke into his mighty chest.

"Rest daughter, luck- **luck favors the prepared**" I joined him in the performers' mantra and Nana waddled over and planted a firm wet kiss on my cheek by way of good night. Mama approached and stroked my hair.

"Sleep well, my brave one."

...

I readied for the auditions, my light-weight, tempered armor fastened about the length of my body and a red silk rose fastened in the braided crown of my mahogany hair. Loose locks are always a terrible thing to have in a fight unless you *want* great patches yanked from your scalp. The events that transpired seem blurred by the sheer excitement and battle glee pumping through my veins. At the conclusion of the day I was summoned and saw two others: a tall man with peppered hair that made him appear neither old nor young and a small, unsteady woman who looked to have just risen from sleep. The Scholar and the Necromancer, I recalled. Both could fight well but I was sure it was there more... unique skills that set them apart. I was wary of the strangers but trusted the prince's judgement; my brief time speaking with Eldin assured me he was a good man. We were to leave the following day.

...

"What is he doing here?!" I stared at my beloved father who had committed the grossest betrayal. My eyes burned with accusations.

"He decided to come on his own" Kenaz countered. "You will protect these people and Alder will protect you."

He smiled and started forward; in the small moment he was at my side he whispered
"you're not the only one who wants a green hill far away."