



### **The Beginnings of The Shields**

The end of everything he knew was on the horizon. As much as Aimery wanted to ignore it, no more could the Fae look the other way. Evil had tipped the scales in their direction.

It was time for something to be done.

“I gather by the look in your eyes that you have a plan?”

Aimery turned to his king and friend, Theron. “I have a plan.”

Rufina glided into the room to her husband and kissed his cheek before she turned to Aimery. “I’m anxious to hear what you’ve come up with.”

Aimery grinned. “Because of the Realm of Nations, we are limited in how we can help the humans.”

“Limited.” A slow smile pulled at Theron’s lips. “You’ve found a loophole.”

“You can say that. Remember the man I found a few months ago?”

“The one called Gabriel?” Rufina asked. “He was on death’s door.”

“But he didn’t die.” Aimery took a deep breath. “He has an amazing healing ability and knowledge of herbs that surpasses even some of our healers.”

Theron snorted. “Impossible.”

“Nay, and you know it. And before you ask, nay, Gabriel’s memories haven’t returned. But

it was while watching him train with some of my warriors that made me realize just how we can defeat this evil attacking the realms.”

Theron lowered himself on his throne and crossed his arms over his chest. “I’m listening.”

“Because this evil is attacking more realms besides Earth, if I can gather a group of the best warriors from different times and realms to train and arm them, we won’t be violating any of the treaty rules in place.”

Rufina glanced at Theron. “This can work.”

“You have men in mind?” Theron asked softly.

Aimery nodded. “I do. Gabriel will be one of them. He’s a magnificent warrior and his healing skills will come in handy if the men become injured.”

Theron’s arms lowered as he thought over Aimery’s words. “How long do you think this will take?”

“I can have all the men here within a few days. They are all formidable warriors who need no training, but there are skills from us that will be to their benefit.”

“Not to mention our weapons will give them an added advantage.”

“Exactly.” Aimery held his breath, waiting for his king and queen to agree to his plan. “We have no other options. I’d love to battle this evil myself, but until it attacks our realm, I can’t. It is slowly, methodically raiding weaker and smaller realms, growing stronger each time a realm dies. We are one of the strongest realms, our magic some of the greatest. Please. Let me try this.”

Theron held up his hand for Aimery to stop. “You don’t have to give me a history lesson, my friend. I’ve been looking for a way that we could somehow help. This evil is strong enough now that he’s assaulting several realms at once. We have to respond now. And with the strike on Earth, it allows us to take that step. If we can end this evil on Earth, we can end it everywhere else.”

“Is that an aye?” Aimery tried not to let the excitement bubbling in him to overflow.

Theron reached over and took Rufina’s hand. She gave a quick nod of her head. Theron turned to Aimery then. “It’s an aye, Commander. You’ve proven how adept you are at leading the Fae army. Show us what you can do with these men.”

“They’ll be called The Shields,” Aimery said softly. He wanted to depart immediately to finish getting everything in place, but he couldn’t leave yet, not until Theron and Rufina were completely satisfied.

“The Shields.” Theron thought that over a moment. “I like that. They are shielding Earth and the other realms. Very nice, Aimery. Very nice.”

“Oh, for magic’s sake,” Rufina said. “Theron, stop it and release Aimery so he can see to his Shields.”

Theron smiled. “Aye, Aimery. Go and gather your men. I’m looking forward to meeting them.”

Aimery turned on his heel and hurried from the throne room, only then remembering that he hadn’t thanked Theron and Rufina. Then again, they had been friends for several millinia, so he was sure they knew he was grateful. But he would tell them that evening when he joined them for supper.

By the time he reached his office, he had decided on his sixth and final warrior he would add to the Shields. Gabriel and Cole had already struck up a friendship and had eagerly accepted Roderick who had arrived just yesterday. Hugh would arrive any moment with Darrak, but there was one last trip Aimery needed to take. A trip back in time to ancient Rome and a famous general. Valentinus Romulus would be the last addition to the group.

Each man brought something different to the mix. Hugh was a natural born leader, a man that others turned to in time of need and war. Roderick was calm, methodical. Cole having been raised with the Fae brought a sense of magic and loyalty. Val had a strategic mind like no other. He could see nuisances of the battlefield and tendencies of his opponents that other men overlooked. Darrack brought humor and steadiness. Gabriel, of course, brought his healing abilities. And each of them was a man to be feared.

Finally, there would be warriors who could battle the evil. Finally, the evil would know that the Fae weren’t going to stand by and allow it to win.

All Aimery had to do now was keep the information coming in so he could gather it for the Shields. Their training would begin as soon as Val returned with him.

Aimery closed his eyes and thought of Rome and the general. In the next heartbeat, sounds around him changed. When he opened his eyes, he was no longer in the Realm of the Fae. He was in Rome. And the man covered in mud, blood and vomit at his feet was Val.

He knelt beside the drunken man who was slumped against the side of a building and shook his head. “Well, General, it looks as though I need to get you sober first.”

“Either kill me or go away,” Val slurred.

“I’m not here to kill you. I’m here to take you away.”

Val’s head swung to him unsteadily, and he closed his eyes. “Take me away? Truly?”

“Aye. I’m in need of a warrior skilled in battle. Your feats on the battlefield are legendary.”

He was quiet so long that Aimery feared he had fallen asleep. He couldn’t shift Val through time without his consent.

“Take me where?”

Aimery sighed. “To another realm far, far away from Rome. Will you come with me?”

A tear slipped slowly down Val’s face. “I’ve nothing left here. Aye. I’ll go with you.” He tried to get his feet underneath him but couldn’t manage it.

Aimery instantly reached out to aid him. “Easy, my friend.” He knew the demons that had made Val turn to drink, and though he couldn’t banish them, he could help the general to push those memories to the back of his mind.

He wrapped Val’s arm around his shoulders and gripped his hand while his other arm came around Val’s waist. “Soon you’ll remember what it felt like to hold a sword in your hand.”

“And the demons?”

Aimery clenched his jaw. His magic was great enough that he could erase those memories from Val’s mind, but those demons are what made him the man he was. To take those away would change Val, and Aimery couldn’t do that.

“The demons will eventually loosen their hold.”

Val licked his lips noisily. “If they don’t kill me first.”

Aimery would cut out his own heart before he let those demons hurt Val. “We’re about to leave Rome. Do you want to say good-bye to anyone?”

Val’s head hung to his chest. “Nay.”

“Then hold on, General. You’re life is about to change.”