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About the time the sun reached its highest point, the clouds thickened and a drizzle made Beau pull the hood of his coat over his head. The weather cast the forest in dull grays. The dim light shone only a few paces past the edge of the path.

What lay deeper in the forest was unseen. Still, Beau felt the same spirit around him—this time with added mystery.

Most of the conversation was between Goron and Doral as the Shaman once again explained the story of the Bell. Throughout the morning Jake made his usual short flights from Goron's shoulder to a tree branch and back, but when the drizzle started, he remained on the comfortable shoulder.

By late afternoon, the clouds had thinned enough to let the sun cast long shadows across the trail. Goron slowed and turned back to face the rest. "We're close to the cutoff to the land of the Elves. We'll see if an Elf is waiting."

After a few more paces down the trail, Beau felt a change—something was missing. Goron stopped and looked from one side of the trail to the other. Jake's head bobbed around as if he were trying to see in all directions at once.

Carlan walked up to the Shaman. "Something isn't right. Too quiet," he whispered. "Yes. Let's move slowly to the cutoff."

They continued, making no sound louder than a soft footstep. Beau could not help looking around, not wanting to see anything but the forest.

The silence was broken by a sudden "Now!" shouted from Beau's right. Before he could react, three men appeared on the trail, each holding a long shaft above his head. LaRue and Doral were instantly clubbed by two of the men. "Not too hard," yelled the third. "We're supposed to deliver them alive!" LaRue and Doral slumped to the ground as their attackers ran to Goron and Carlan. Beau took a step toward the fallen travelers, but before he could get there, the third brought his staff over his head, held it against his throat, and pulled him tight against his body.

Goron and Carlan fought their assailants as well as

they could, but they had no weapons. Carlan caught one of the staff blows in his arms, but his opponent kicked him in the stomach and was able to pull the staff from Carlan's hands and land a stiff blow to his side. About then, Goron freed himself enough to extend his arms. Waves rippled through the air, smoke rising from them as if the air were burning. Instantly they reached the assailant's chest. After a cracking sound, the would-be attacker opened his mouth in a silent scream and fell to the ground.

The man who came at Carlan gave him a blow to the head, then ran to Tori, brought his staff over her, and held her as Beau was held. "Cooperate or these two are dead!" he yelled.

"No!" Beau screamed. He lifted his foot and stomped it on his captor's toes as hard as he could. The staff loosened for an instant, just long enough for Beau to escape. He ran faster than he knew he could and threw himself on the back of Tori's attacker, who released her and threw Beau to the ground with a sharp twist of his back. He raised his staff and began to bring it down on Beau.

Beau heard a sound like the dull thump of a stone hitting the ground. His assailant fell to the forest floor with an arrow sticking out of his back. The third attacker started running down the trail. Goron raised his arms and stopped him with more waves. Then the Shaman collapsed.