

The wind blasted, cloaking the watchtower and rooting between the stones. Malin's stomach tightened at the swooshing beyond the loophole where he stood. The enemy enjoyed crushing moral through the giant hawk's circling.

It was the thirty-seventh night of the tower siege and everyone knew it wouldn't be long now. No messengers had survived, rations had long been critically low, and all the tunnels had been discovered and sealed. No, it wouldn't be long.

"Oh God, if you're out there, please just kill us quickly. I won't ask that you save us, just that it be swift." The tears shook him as he leaned heavily against the stone. "Why? Why in heaven's name did you bring me here? Father, he was strong at heart. I'm not."

Footfalls behind him drew his attention. He hurriedly turned aside so moonlight wouldn't catch his face.

"Any activity?" a voice inquired.

"Little sir," Malin said quickly.

"How are you Malin?"

Startled to hear his name, he turned and saw an officer addressing him. He never recalled them speaking before, but knew he was Eben, a respected man. "Fine sir," Malin lied. Eben studied him as silence consumed the tower. Malin wished he hadn't turned.

"Are you afraid?" Eben finally asked. Again, the stillness roared.

"Yes, sir," Malin said.

"What scares you soldier?"

"I'm not a soldier. I'm a lad pretending, but who have I fooled? It matters little now, it's all meaningless."

"What is meaningless, Malin?"

“Me, my life. Nothing I do means anything. I stand at the end and all my life hasn’t mattered. I don’t know why I’m here. I’m weak and useless.”

The stillness was filled with the rhythmic whooshing. Eben’s heart ached for the lad. He burned for him to understand. To hold as a father holds a son. That resistance fall, and peace heal like a quiet stream.

“Malin, God doesn’t carelessly create, nor bring about a time without intention. He designs and establishes with purpose.” Eben paused, placing a hand on the stone wall. “A designer established plans and laid each stone with intention years ago. It still stands, serving its purpose. Have faith, God is a far more skilled architect than we.

“Perhaps through man’s eyes all you’ve done is empty. Perhaps you’re weak and stilled with fear. Oh to see through God’s eyes and understand! Call upon the Lord, the source of strength, Malin, and stand on the truth.” Eben continued, “You’re relieved for tonight. Go, sleep until the fifth hour.” He grasped Malin’s bow, taking his position at the loophole.

“Sir?”

“Yes lad?”

“Thank you.”

Eben nodded and the young man was heard descending the stairs.

\* \* \* \* \*

“Everybody up!” a feverish shout bellowed. Malin winced, his back stiff with cold. A volcanic crash vibrated through the hollow chamber. “Brace the door! Get some bowmen on the second floor!” an authority commanded.

Malin scrambled for a crossbow and the second floor. “Aim for the rammers!” an officer

yelled. Malin crouched at the loophole and aimed. He heard the empty thud as the arrow vanished and found its mark. He winced, fumbling to reload. Pulling the trigger, he watched it fall bluntly off a man's armor. His hands became numb from clenching.

“Oh, God, show me your way through this.” he whispered. Splintering timber and the rammers disappearance foretold the enemy's advance. The bowmen clambered downstairs loosing a folly of arrows at the opening.

“Fall back!” someone shouted. They began ascending the stairs with the archers covering them. “Malin!” a voice yelled. He turned and saw Eben beside him. “Stand on the truth. The battle is real, but so is the hope. Hope in the Living God.”

“I can't take this. I'm not strong enough. I can't stand alone.” Malin said. Eben knew what Malin bore, yet he carried it even more fully. How he loved the lad. “Straighten up little soldier, you never stand alone.”

Their adversaries filled the entrance as Thanatos, the commander of the enemy ranks, entered. Eben waited, then leapt onto the general below, sword plunging fatally. Attackers drove into Eben until he too fell silently beside their lifeless general. Malin stood, frozen.

During the confusion, one of their own crossed the battlefield arriving at the town of Raven's Wind, where reinforcements were found. So the siege of the Highland Tower ended the thirty-eighth night.

\* \* \* \* \*

The battered door rebelled upon opening. Nine months had passed since the Highlander's victory, yet Malin battled on. He found himself at the tower, seeking closure to the events that occurred there.

“God doesn’t carelessly create, nor bring about a time without intention,” his dead leader’s words filled his mind. Malin touched the single boulder sustaining the lower foundation; firm, immovable. A robin whistled outside. They were known as messengers, and a sign of hope. He sighed, letting weight shed like a sodden coat. “Lord, I’ve faced many battles, yet I’ve never stood alone.”

He withdrew tools from his belt and began carving the stone above the door. As darkness formed, he blew the dust off his hands and shone a lamp to read the words.

“From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For Thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy.”

The battered door banged open and debris covering the floor moved as though a mighty, silent wind was inside.

“Malin,” came a whisper. “Malin.”

“I’m here” Malin said, his tools dropping to the floor.

“Don’t fear. I’m establishing my name here. It shall be a refuge that cannot be shaken, for it is built by my hand and what I’ve established no man can move. Keep on Malin, my purpose for you will be fulfilled.”

Silently, the wind left leaving words covering the foundation stone. Deliverer, Everlasting Father, Savior, Hope. Malin would face more battles, but he began to see through the eyes of God.