

The Invisible Guide

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Dedicated to my parents for teaching me
reading, writing, art, and, most importantly,
about the Creator.

“Remember now your Creator in the days
of your youth...”
Ecclesiastes 12:1

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Map of Elarda and the Surrounding Countries



CHAPTER ONE:

Troubling Events

BRIELLE

The sky was gray, and a girl called Brielle Fletcher was weeding the garden in front of the house. Brielle was fifteen years old, and she had extremely curly brown hair, blue eyes, and a scar on her left cheek. She lived in Glenville, which, as you might expect, was a village in a glen. It was in the kingdom of Elarda, and she lived there with her father, mother, older sister, Elaine, younger brothers, Alistair and Jaxson, and younger sister, Carissa.

“Brielle!”

At the sound of her mother’s voice, Brielle went inside the house. It was a little stone house with a thatched roof and smoke rising from the chimney. Brielle’s mother was in the kitchen, a cozy room with pots and pans and herbs hanging from the low ceiling.



“Yes, mother?” Brielle asked.

Mother stopped stirring a pot of soup and turned to Brielle. Handing her a coin, she said, “Go to the market, and buy some bread and cheese. Hurry back. And don’t go near the garrison. Keep away from any soldiers.”

Brielle nodded. Her mother said the same thing every time she asked her to go the market. Brielle wondered why she always told her not to go near the garrison. Sure, a garrison where soldiers stayed was not the best place for a young girl, but Brielle wondered if there was another reason. She’d never heard Mother say it to Elaine.

Brielle stepped outside and began walking to the market. It was a coldish morning in late spring, and she was glad to be wearing her warm cloak.

She walked past several houses and soon reached the market. There were not as many people there as usual, and Brielle could hear a commotion a little ways away. She walked past a booth where a young woman was selling herbs, and stopped at a stand where she bought bread and cheese from an old woman who didn’t seem much interested in her or the commotion or anything else for that matter. Brielle was glad of that. She was tired of people saying things about the scar on her face. She didn’t know why it was there. She had often wondered about it, but when she’d asked her mother, Mother had only said something like, “It’s just the way you are.”

Brielle, who was a very curious girl, stowed the bread and cheese in her basket and started walking towards the commotion.

She wouldn’t go near the garrison, she told herself, she

would just see what was happening. She pulled her hood up over her head and tried to blend in with the crowd. Standing on tiptoes and peering between heads, she strained to see what all the fuss was about. Then she saw. Two soldiers gripped the arms of an older man. The old man was holding a book, a leather bound book with some kind of emblem on the front. One soldier wrenched the book from the man's grasp, saying, "By order of King Ornan, you are hereby arrested for treason and for possession of the Forbidden Book."

The Forbidden Book? Brielle thought. She knew very little about the book referred to as The Forbidden Book, but she knew it was illegal to own one. She wondered why someone would risk imprisonment, death even, just for owning a book.

As the soldiers led him away, the man turned back toward the crowd. His eyes pleading, he spoke, "You are believing a lie. Turn back before—" But he didn't finish whatever it was he was going to say for a soldier struck him with the hilt of his sword, rendering him unconscious. They lifted his limp form into a wagon.

Brielle stood stock still, staring, until she felt someone touch her elbow.

"Come on, Brielle, let's go." It was Arden. His family—that is, Arden and his mother and sister; his father was dead—lived next door to Brielle. Arden was a year older than Brielle, had tousled dark brown hair, blue eyes, and was almost always smiling. Not now, though. Now he was serious. Sad, too, Brielle thought. She began following him

back towards home.

They walked in silence. Brielle got the feeling that he knew more about what had just happened than she did, but she didn't ask about it.

Soon, they were home. Arden went into his family's house, turning to give her a friendly wave. Brielle waved back and walked up to her family's house.

BAIRD

It was night now in Glenville, and a man clad in a dark cloak walked down the main street. Baird was his name, and he was about fifty years old.

Baird stopped in front of a building. There was enough light coming from the windows for him to make out the words on the sign. *The Golden Arrow Inn.*

Yes, he thought to himself, *this is the place.*

He ducked inside the crowded, noisy tavern and scanned the room. There were tables filled with men talking, laughing, banging fists on the table, and generally making a commotion. But in a far corner of the room, a man sat alone, still and quiet. Baird felt sure that was the man he was supposed to meet. The Head Ranger.

Baird took a good look at the man before walking over to him. He was tall, a good bit taller than Baird. His hooded cloak covered most of his gray hair. His hand rested on his sword hilt. He turned and looked straight at Baird.

Baird walked over and sat down across from the man. "You are Baird," the man said, but not as a question. It was obvious he knew who Baird was.

Baird opened his mouth to speak, but before he could, a

young man in a dirty apron stood before them and asked, “Might I get you fellows somethin’ to drink?”

The man across from Baird said, “Two black teas, please.”

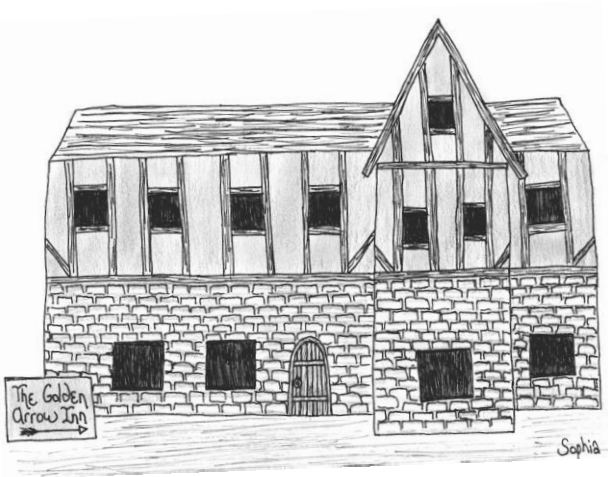
The young man eyed him questioningly, “Just tea?” he asked.

“Yes.”

He shrugged, “Alright, if that’s what you want.”

As soon as the young man walked away, the man across from Baird spoke, “Now to business. I hear you wish to join the Rangers.”

Baird nodded. It was true. He did want to join the Rangers. He knew very little of what the Rangers actually did. But he knew they stood against Ornan. And he knew they stood for the truth, as did he. This man Baird was meeting with was the Head Ranger. He was the one who decided who would join the Rangers and who would go on what missions.



The Head Ranger continued, speaking in a low voice, “As Rangers, our mission is to seek the truth, to follow the Creator, even if we are alone, and to find the rightful heir to the throne, anointing them king instead of this false king, Ornan.” The Ranger’s voice lowered further, “We know there is yet an heir alive.”

At that moment, the young man walked over with two pint-sized mugs of steaming tea. He set them down, sloshing some over the sides as he did so, and walked away.

“Before Ornan took the kingdom by treachery,” the Ranger continued, “the king had two children.”

“I know,” Baird said, “But were they not killed?”

“There is a prophecy,” the Ranger glanced about to be sure no one was listening, then continued, “There is a prophecy,” he repeated, “Given us by the Creator, that the true heir will return and prove themselves to be the true heir by slaying a deadly beast in the king’s city, Mountainview. I do not know which one of the king’s children is still living or whether it will be they who returns or their child or their grandchild. I do not know when it will be. It may not happen until after I am gone. But I believe this prophecy will come true, and we Rangers are looking for the true heir, spreading the truth, keeping a light burning in the midst of this darkness.” He paused for emphasis. “Are you in?”

“Yes,” said Baird, “I’m in.”

“Well, then,” said the Head Ranger, “You get this.” He took a ring out from somewhere in his clothes and set it on the table in front of Baird. Baird picked up the ring, held it

up, and looked closely at it. It was a thick band of metal with a circle in the middle of the front. Inside the circle was carved an oak tree. *The giant oak tree*, Baird thought. He knew what that symbol meant. It represented something that was dearer to him than anything else.

BRIELLE

It was late afternoon and Brielle was just going to leave the market (she went to the market nearly every day) to come home when she realized something interesting was happening by the garrison. She could hear her mother's voice, "*Don't go near the garrison. Keep away from any soldiers.*"

Pushing aside any pricks of her conscience, she began walking that direction. She was thinking of the arrest she'd witnessed a few days before. *Perhaps*, she thought, *it has something to do with that*. She'd been wondering about it ever since.

Soon, Brielle could see the garrison. There were a few low, gray stone buildings which housed the king's soldiers. And there was a platform with a hangman's noose. A large crowd was gathered around it, and several soldiers stood by. Two soldiers were leading a man toward the noose. The man she had seen arrested. As they led him to his death, the man called out to the people.

Brielle climbed a set of a few stone steps to join the crowd.

"Repent!" the man was saying, "Turn from your evil

deeds! Turn away from the lie you have been following! The Creator offers forgiveness if you will only turn to Him.”

The man continued preaching, but the crowd was now jeering so loudly she could hardly hear him.

“Shut the old fool up!” someone yelled.

And they were going to do just that.

The rope was around his neck now. They began to lift him off the ground and tighten the noose.

“Oh, Adonai, forgive them!” Brielle heard him cry.

Just then, an old soldier looked her direction. Their eyes met. There was something about the way his eyes looked at her that frightened her, but she didn’t want to leave yet. She moved over where she was behind a tall man and looked between heads to see what was happening.

Suddenly, without warning it seemed, the heavens began to unleash buckets of rain. Thunder rumbled and lightning flashed.

I’ve got to get home! Brielle thought. She turned, and began to run away from the crowd who still stood and taunted as the man breathed his last breaths.

In just a few minutes, she was soaked to the skin. She scrambled down the steps but slipped on the last one and fell. She felt a sharp pain in her arm. Pulling herself to her feet, she looked at her right arm and realized she’d scraped it on a rock. Blood was beginning to soak through her sleeve. She picked up her basket of bread which was now wet, soggy bread.

She kept going until she stood in front of her home. Then she stopped. She looked at her sleeve, stained with blood.

Her mother would ask what had happened. She would have to tell her. Why, oh why, had she gone near the garrison? Brielle slowly walked up to the door.

