

## CHAPTER 3: MUTINY

*It is a poor man who pities himself.  
--Haakor, The Tome, 932 AD*

As the story of Anders' dramatic accident spread throughout the caverns, Sissel distractedly performed her chores while she awaited news of his condition. When she finally heard that Anders had left Idin's chambers, she ran through the darkened corridors and into her brother's sleeping hall. She found him on his bed, staring at the ceiling.

"Anders, what happened?" she asked. "You've never fallen before."

He turned toward the wall then drew back from the stone, its sharply mineral smell suddenly repellent.

Sissel tucked a loose braid back into the coils which had fallen in her haste. "I've been worried about you."

Anders felt a headache begin to form behind his eyes. He wondered if Sissel could tell.

"Anders, you have to talk to me. Something is going on, I know it."

Reluctantly he began to describe the dream, with the sun and the wind and the tree called Yggdrasil. “You know I always have that same dream,” she said. “We’ve had that dream since the beginning.”

He traced the patterns in his blanket as he considered his accident. Why did he have to talk about it? It only made him feel worse. He glanced over to Sissel, who sat waiting, her hands neatly folded in her lap. Then he began his story despite his regret. “The dream. It’s been changing.”

Sissel frowned and leaned closer. “What do you mean, changing?”

“Your song—the one about the fjords—it’s sadder now. You look unhappy when you sing it.” He sniffed. “And sometimes Father is in that dream now, too,” he said in a low voice. “In the good dream, I mean. Not just the scary ones about, well, you know.” Misery rushed over him like a wave, filling him with an overpowering feeling of drowning. “Whenever I dream anything now—even the good dream—my head aches when I wake up. And now my hands hurt every day. That’s why I fell. I couldn’t hang on!”

“Oh, Anders,” Sissel said sadly. She gazed around the gloomy sleeping hall. “Maybe we’ve been too long underground. Maybe you don’t have enough to think about. Why don’t you do what I do, and go to the library room?”

“Oh yeah, Sissel. More work. Good idea.”

“No, really. There are loads of wonderful books there. Books that explain things—you would like them. There are books about sea exploration, castles, the stars in navigation, things like that.”

“Big deal.”

“There are even books of the sagas.”

His eyebrows rose in slight interest, then fell again. He knew books wouldn't change anything. He would still be stuck in this dreadful place.

"Books can take you away from here, Anders. You won't feel so isolated. You can go anywhere you want in your mind."

"I'd rather go outside."

Sissel sighed. "Maybe someone could tell us more tales about Father. Maybe someone can tell us stories about the old village." She glanced at him and frowned. "You have a headache, don't you? I could do your chores while you rest. I'm sure that would be all right. Would that help?"

"I guess."

They sat together in silence, then Anders stirred. "What's the matter?" Sissel said.

"I have something to show you, but it's a secret." He reached under the covers and pulled out the eight-sided box. The lid stood in sharp relief under the glow of the crystals overhead as he opened it. "Father made me a book. Idin gave it to me." He paused. "I feel bad, though. You had one too, once, but I guess it got lost. You can share mine."

Sissel closed her eyes for so long that Anders wondered if she had fallen asleep, but she finally reached for the book. She lightly touched the pages and began to read. She brightened, running her fingers softly over the cover. Then her smile faded as she touched her cheek.

"Well," she said, "now we have something more than dreams. That's more than most people." She looked at the book again. "Anders, you must hide this. It'll upset everyone."

"I know. That's what Idin said. I have a place under my bed. All the things that are special to me are there. But don't look," he warned, thinking about what lay below, hidden. His secret box. Not even Sissel knew.

“Don’t worry, I won’t ruin your secrets,” she said. A tense expression crossed her face. “Tell me about Idin’s rooms. Are they horrible?”

“Not really,” he admitted. “They’re actually pretty interesting. It’s too dark, though. Creepy. And there was this animal—”

Footsteps echoed in the hall. “Hurry!” Sissel said. “Put the book away.”

Just as he forced the eight-sided box under his pillow, a group of children made their way into the sleeping hall. “We’re allowed!” Ana shouted. “Mother Elder said we could come if we finished everything first.”

They joined Anders until he was surrounded by a boisterous mass of arms and legs. There was Ana, checking his hands and singing, and Tomas, who made a pretend army with his fingers and staged surprise attacks upon Anders’ legs. Erik sat and read made-up poems in a loud, theatrical voice.

“Sissel!” cried Ulle, the only red-headed child in the caverns. She burst into the Stage 10 sleeping hall. “Look what I made your brother!” Ulle held out a stuffed bear made from leftover cloth filled with dried seed coatings from the planting rooms. She gave it a vigorous shake in Anders’ direction. He grabbed the bear and held it tightly to his chest, not minding the cacophony that surrounded him. He listened as Ulle regaled everyone with daring tales, none of which, he knew, were possibly true. An unaccustomed feeling of happiness suddenly filled his heart.

Tomas marched his fingers toward Anders, who began to think about about his secret box. He reassured himself that it was perfectly well hidden. Then he tensed, his eyes wide. Tomas’ pretend army had just given him an idea. “I’ll be right back,” he said. “Don’t leave.”

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Deep in the caverns, Anders shielded his eyes as he stepped into the blazing light of the planting rooms. Valuable crystals covered every inch of the walls and ceiling, illuminating the expanse as if it were a spring day in the wild, green pastures above ground. He rooted around one of the baskets of debris from the planting beds, picking up bits of broken woody stems and twigs and putting them in his pocket. Things for his secret box.

From the adjoining room Mother Kistran's voice rose high and sharp, interrupting the quiet. Anders raised his head and straightened, wondering why the Mothers were secretly meeting in the next chamber. He crept into the shadows of the corridor and stood motionless near the archway, his palm resting near his cheek against the cool, stony wall.

"Don't be so upset, Kistran," Marit said, her dark blonde hair braided high at the crown. "You know we need to be practical."

Kistran ignored her and stood. "These children don't have a normal life!" she said, starting to pace. "For nearly ten years we have lived underground, away from the . . . terrible things above."

Anders stiffened. Terrible things above? What terrible things? He strained to hear the rest.

"Listen," Kistran said. "The children accepted their fate at the time—they were so young then. Some of them were even babies. But they question it now—they are certainly old enough."

"Tell us something new," Solveig said.

Kistran smoothed her robes and glowered. "The children live like miniature adults. Everything is work, work, and more work, then even more work after that. Even the exercise is for a purpose. It isn't normal."

“Correct,” Solveig said flatly.

Trin, the fourth Mother, sat quiet, stroking a section of her sleek dark hair. Her calm gaze traveled from Mother to Mother as they argued.

“Living here isn’t normal in the first place,” Solveig continued. “You seem to forget that.”

“As though I could forget!”

The room fell into awkward silence. “Kistran,” Marit finally said. “You understand the work necessities. It’s a complex life underground. We need to keep everything running. Our lives depend on it. And don’t forget the Trials, and the preparations. The children will never survive without the training. We’re running out of time. Besides, why are you complaining about it now? It’s not exactly news.”

“I brought this up a year ago,” Kistran said, “and no one listened to me then. Now an entire year has passed. It’s spring again, and nothing has changed.”

“Untrue,” Solveig said. “The children are one year older, stronger, and better equipped.”

“Think about it, Kistran,” Marit urged. “We are giving them a normal life, considering. We are protecting their innocence while maximizing their preparedness. I should think *that* would be foremost in your mind. You’re the one who wants them to remain children.”

Anders drew deeper into the shadows as if the mention of children would somehow expose him to the Mothers. What did they mean about maximizing their preparedness? There was never anything to prepare for. He dared to lean closer.

“You know there’s little time left before the Trials,” Solveig was saying. “We can’t afford any errors, any weakness at all. Besides, Idin will never allow it. She has given herself completely to the children’s cause. This is no time to experiment. It’s out of the question.”

“Giving the children a normal life is not an experiment!”

Idin strode into the room. “I believe their normal life was taken away ten years ago, Mother Kistran.”

The Mothers silenced. Marit looked down at her lap.

“I could hear you all the way in my chambers. I suggest you lower your voice. You’ll frighten the children.”

Kistran ignored her and pointed an accusatory finger. “You, Idin, of all people should know! We are letting down our children. They know nothing of their past, of their heritage, of the natural games of childhood.”

“Don’t be ridiculous. We haven’t time.”

Solveig stood. “The Trials are soon, and we’re not ready. We’re not even ready to tell them.”

A chill crept over Anders’ body. The Trials. He kept hearing those words . . . his mind was a confused fog lately, and now the Mothers were arguing. Nothing made sense any more. Just like that story he heard from Tomas . . . he said they had actually been forced underground by wolves. Wolves! He shivered. But that couldn’t be right. What did wolves have to do with their missing villagers? Their fathers? They had all died from disease. That’s what everyone thought.

Idin addressed the room. “Solveig is right. Much is at stake. We don’t have time for change. We don’t even have time for this conversation! We must think of the future—that is

our responsibility. Yours too, Kistran, lest you forget. I won't allow it. The worst is happening soon, and we're not ready."

"I'm sorry, but I don't agree," Kistran said. "Not about this." She walked around the room, picking up items and setting them down with a clatter. "I won't give up until everyone listens. And that includes you, Idin."

Idin turned to Kistran, her eyes like ice in the depth of winter. "Do not undermine my leadership, Kistran." Idin took a step forward. "I know you mean well. But you are focusing on things we cannot afford. These are commonplace, time-wasting activities. I am not interested in casting away ten years of hard work for the sake of some games and stories. I shall never offer up untrained children to their certain oblivion." She looked pointedly at Kistran. "Not even if it's your idea." Idin took Kistran's elbow and escorted her to another room, a heavy silence trailing behind.

All Anders could think about were Idin's ominous words, *we're not ready*.

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Over dinner that night the children failed to notice any strain between the Mothers, even Anders, who was being entertained. His worries over the Mothers' argument had evaporated when Tomas arrived in high spirits. Anders nibbled little pieces of a thick potato pancake, a small, indulgent smile lighting up his face every now and then while listening to another one of Tomas' ludicrous stories.

And then the mood changed. Ana couldn't stop talking about Anders' perilous slide down the climbing wall. She excitedly recounted the details to all who would listen, her food growing cold. Anders ate busily with his head down in response. "Ana, not now," he said



under his breath. As his thoughts returned to his miserable day, he wished he were somewhere else, preferably far, far away from this terrible place.

“Don’t worry! It’s nothing to be embarrassed about, you know,” she said, patting him on the shoulder.

“He’s not such a big hero,” Garen blurted out, looking satisfied by the shocked faces around him. “No one ever falls.” Anders reddened and slowly set down his pancake.

A splat of food suddenly landed next to Anders’ plate, and then another, this time hitting Anders’ cheek. Anders slowly wiped his face, his anger rising at the sight of the smirking Garen. His heart began to pound.

Tomas jumped to his feet. “You jerk!” he shouted down the table.

“Yeah?” Garen said. “What’s so great about Anders, anyway? He has a sister *and* a mother, but he still sneaks around, and now he has a stupid accident.” He gave Anders a defiant look. “It’s the dumbest thing I’ve ever seen.”

Tomas climbed over the table to grab Garen, then froze as Anders slammed his cup on the table. Shards of precious crockery flew across the room. “I’ve had enough! Enough of everything!” Anders stormed over to Garen and gave him a violent shake. “Try living here your whole life with a mother who’s too busy taking care of everyone else!” He shook Garen again. “Try that!”

“Anders,” Erik warned, frowning. “Stop that. What’s wrong with you?”

Anders returned to his seat, feeling the burning flame of fury turn to shame as Idin strode in with the Mothers. She abruptly halted, her long linen robe sweeping across her ankles. Red spots of anger appeared high on her cheeks. “Who is responsible for this outrage?”

The boys remained silent.

Ana stomped over. "I can tell you!" she said, her hands on her hips. "He did it." She pointed unmistakably at Garen. "It's all his fault. I saw everything." She glared at him openly. Tomas jumped off the table and angrily crossed his arms.

"Wait . . ." Anders said. "It's my fault. But it's all right now."

"Quite untrue, Anders," Idin said. "There is nothing all right about this at all." She studied the boys, then called for Geyorg. "Take Tomas and Garen to the water room," she said to him. "That should take care of it. Anders, you come with me."

For the second time, Anders was led to Idin's menacing rooms.

As he entered her forechamber, Anders glanced warily at the dark shapes among the shadows. The room had lost some of its frightening aspect since his previous visit, although everything seemed as dark and strange as before. He scanned the room for the furry shape, wishing he could see everything in brighter light.

"Please," Idin said, motioning to the hidden alcove with the linen and fur. He sat, resting his hands flat on the tops of his legs. Idin studied him, then leaned forward. "Somehow you have brought a considerable amount of trouble upon yourself today. Have you not?"

"Yes, Mother Elder, I have," he said miserably. He rubbed the fur between his fingers as his thoughts ran back to the fight at the table and his mixed up feelings over Garen. Actually, it wasn't *all* his fault, was it? "Garen brings trouble upon himself."

"Pardon me?"

"He's mean. That really irritates Tomas, just so you know. And there's something else. Even though he's nasty to everyone, lately it's me he hates."

"I'm sure he doesn't hate you. Do you really think that?"

Anders shrugged. His earlier feelings of equanimity were suddenly gone.

Idin pressed on. "I thought you said it was your fault."

"It was, in a way. I was getting too much attention. And I did get mad." He studied the floor. "But actually, his attitude is his own problem."

"And what about Tomas? Is he innocent?"

"Yes! Well—I suppose not."

"Anders, I want you to tone it down a little. You're in the center of a lot of trouble lately, whether you admit it or not."

A look of regret crossed his face. "I don't mean to be."

"You must try to tone it down," Idin repeated. She peered closer at Anders. "You have loyal friends. That accounts for something. It will help you when it comes to the task I am going to require of you. But I have something to show you first." Her pale gray eyes turned the color of steel. She rose and stood by a wall Anders had not noticed before. The deep shadows gave way as Idin pulled a violet crystal from her robes and shed a pale lilac light over the stone. The wall was bare, except for a deep handprint cut into the stone.

Idin set her hand into the recessed shape and waited. The wall slid slowly away with a grinding sound, as though something was moving behind it. A wheel, perhaps, Anders thought. He peered fearfully past Idin, hoping nothing frightening would appear that would explain the stories of her terrifying rooms. But all he saw were shelves of books.

Idin held her crystal closely to the rows of narrow books, each wrapped in paper with a year written on its spine in faded ink. She pulled out a book marked 1028 and read its title. She hastily put it back, then removed the one beside it. "1027," she said. "Of course. That

was the year.” Then she joined him in the alcove and set the book in the middle of the wooden table. It was too dark to read its title.

Anders tightened his fingers around the gold-flecked stone in his pocket, fighting the urge to see if it could shed even a glimmer of light so he could study the book. He wondered why Idin was keeping it in darkness.

“These books are sealed,” she said. “They are the legal proceedings of the village Council. They can only be opened by the petition of someone aged sixteen years or older. Even though I was on the Council, I cannot reveal its contents, even now.” She set her violet crystal near the book. Anders made out a thick, red seal made of something that looked like wax. A shape of an eagle had been pressed into it, and a thin black ribbon ran under the seal and tightly around the paper-covered book.

“But it is not unlawful to show you the title,” Idin said quietly. With one finger she slid the book toward him, her eyes on Anders’ face.

*The Banishment of Fenris.* Anders stared at the words, struggling to understand why Idin was showing the book to him now. He pulled it closer and saw a second title, smaller, underneath the first. *The Abuse and Relocation of Garen.* He stared at the words as an acid curl of nausea twisted through his body. The image of him shaking Garen seared his mind.

“Garen’s father was banished for his crimes, Anders. His name was Fenris.”

Anders sat in silence, his ears ringing. The room felt stuffy and closed in. He wanted to leave and go somewhere, anywhere; anything to avoid thinking about Garen’s terrible beginnings. Reluctantly he thought about his attitude toward Garen, about all their attitudes. But no words came forth.

“Remember the rock climbing, Anders,” Idin said. “You certainly benefited from help then. Perhaps *you* could place an outstretched hand.”

She reached for Anders in the manner of Kistran’s rescuing gesture at the climbing wall. “I am going to ask that you look at yourself. I want you to start considering yourself rightly as a natural leader, and use those very qualities that invoke such loyalty amongst your friends and extend them to all children. Some day you will understand this. It will become easier in time.” Idin reached for a pitcher of water and two stone cups, and set one before Anders and filled it. “Begin with this: I want you to talk to your friends. I want you to find a way of encouraging their friendship with Garen without betraying the confidence I have shared with you tonight. You have the gift to inspire and lead, and this is an excellent opportunity to start using it.” She suddenly gripped his hand. “You have a calling, Anders. You’ve squandered your gift on secrets and little games.”

Anders thought about his secret box, the Secret Club, his sliding and his private jokes. He closed his eyes and rubbed his temples, and pictured himself deeply asleep in his bed. “I’m sorry,” he said.

“Good. Then I may presume you shall do as I ask.”

He thought back to Garen and pictured his leering face. “Right away?”

“Anders.”

His thoughts returned to Garen’s disturbing story. A small charitable feeling toward Garen began to take form. He reluctantly pictured himself in the center of a group, explaining and organizing, being persuasive. He supposed he could do it—he knew Garen needed the help. It was plain.

He looked at Idin. “I don’t want to stand out. I don’t like that.”

“You have your ways, Anders. You don’t have to be obvious.”

Anders finished his water and set down the cup. He didn’t exactly know what he would say to the Secret Club, but there was one thing he did know for certain. He didn’t like this talk about natural leadership. He would take care of Garen, but nothing more—he wouldn’t lead anyone, anywhere. Not in his whole life.

He turned and left the room without a backward look.