

Chapter II

*T*he next morning, as I am frying a rare

delicacy for us, which today, happens to be fresh hard boiled eggs and some sausage from our last pig, I hear many thumps on the small, flimsy, red door of our church. I walk to the door, wondering who would come to this side of the country. As I open the door, a little stab of fear clenches my heart fiercely as I see the tax collector. Wrapped in a warm, green cloth tunic, there are sacs of money tied around his waist with a rope. I stutter, before saying slowly and carefully, "Welcome. Would you like to come in...for tea?". He grunts and replies casually, "No, but The King needs your land payments and paper taxes....if you don't have the gold, your house is taken." He hands me a crisp, gold sheet, stating the bill for the payments, and at the bottom, signed in emerald green ink, the name below:

King Arthur

I gasp when I see the number printed on the paper: 50 gold coins. I know we don't have the money, but in my heart, I realize that if I don't pay the fines, The King will boot us out of our land, and Brother Ethel will definitely die. I slowly trudge up the stairs, my mind not filled with the smell of sausage, but instead with dread. I make my way downstairs again and give the tax collector our entire savings, no longer hidden in my dresser but in a small sac the tax collector holds. I close the door, fall to my knees, curl up in a ball, weep silently and wish to never wake again.

Chapter III

I lie on my bed, weary, but unable to

drift into sleep. My thin, wisp of a sheet, barely covering my knees, brings me no comfort or warmth. Melancholy thoughts congeal above me like storm clouds about to blow. I want to scream in vain, punch my pillow, and hang my head in shame, for everything I try has done nothing to benefit Brother Ethel. Instead I lie there, anger welling up inside me. I get up and pace around the room like a mad man, contemplating all my troubles. Finally, I decide it best to go to the outhouse. Upon reaching there, I do my business, and hastily leave, but do not quite make it out the structure. I kneel down on the floor, the hideous smell enveloping me, before collapsing into unconsciousness.

When I wake, at what I presume is dawn, something appears different, missing, distant. I am surrounded by darkness, but can feel the heat rays of the sun. My eyes adjust, and I make out undulating forms. There is a disgusting stench, and I feel crammed in, like an animal in a cage. I feel around, and touch hard, rough, wood. My hand brushes past a latch. I open it, and am blinded by light, as I stumble outside, barely able to see our dilapidated church. I reach a conclusion quickly: presumably I mistakenly slept in the outhouse and was not able to wake up at the designated hour. Sadly, there appears to be a flaw with my conclusion; nothing moves the slightest bit, and it is as quiet and sullen as an empty desert. Suddenly, realization and fear sweeps over me. I start running, running faster than I thought possible, racing against time, for I fear it may be too late.

