

THE  
TREASURE  
OF CAPRIC  
THE KING OF THE CAVES - BOOK ONE

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MERIDIAN, IDAHO

SAMPLE CHAPTER

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# Prologue

Capric hill sprouted from the flat Plain of Apos like the kernel of a young mountain. When people first established a small town in the gentle crook of the nearby river, the hill had been the favorite spot of shepherds. Their sheep preferred the tender shrubs and long grasses at its top to the spongy clumps of moss-like grass that grew on the plain below. The shrubs gave the shepherds shade, and the hill's height made it easy to spot predators. But the shepherds and their flocks had long ago given way to the Capric Monks, and the shrubs and grasses had disappeared beneath their fortified compound. For three centuries, the hill had housed the monks, and deep within, it held the secret treasure they protected.

Prophecy told them that the peace and prosperity of the entire nation surrounding the plain depended upon their protection of the treasure. They clung to that belief even after the kingdom fell and the river that gave the land life dried up.

Then a gloom settled over the land of Pallingham, and the Caprics could no longer see far across the plain from the top of their hill. Generations passed without seeing sun or sky, and the monks continued in their devotion. But each class of recruits was more ignorant of the order's purpose, and they were harder to relieve of their doubts.

With each year of increasing drought and dwindling crops, the monks showed their dedication by strengthening the fortifications. The timber wall at the base of the hill was slowly replaced by an earthen rampart with a stone parapet running across the top. The compound erected as a promise of hope was hidden from view. From outside, only the top branches of the Great Oak planted by the Caprics in their first year peeked above the wall as they swayed in the breeze.



# The Capric Monks

Every morning, Kurian Abramson joined his troop for pre-dawn studies in the damp stone cell of their classroom at the foot of Capric hill. Their dean, Noeman Goodman, lectured and quizzed them about the history of their order and the Rule that governed their lives, and then prayed for almost as long as he lectured.

“And for the health of our abbot, we ask your blessing,” Dean Goodman said in his most pious tone.

After ten years of the dean’s monotonous voice, Kurian could barely focus on distinguishing one word from another. So, he found other ways to keep his mind occupied. He opened one eye and peeked around the room as the dean droned on in prayer. The other boys kept their eyes closed. After much discipline, Kurian had learned to be still and silent during the dean’s

supplications. He had learned to ignore the desperate need to itch at his coarse robes. He had taught himself how to yawn without opening his mouth or making a sound. But Kurian could still not resist the temptation to open his eyes during prayer and see the unguarded faces of those around him. He glanced at the dean, who had not noticed him this time.

Feeling confident, Kurian opened his other eye, his head still bowed, and looked at each of the boys in turn. Nine other novitiates stood in a circle with their dean. Kurian and Rhys Brock were the eldest, both seventeen. Rhys had grown this year. He already stood a head taller than all of them. Tobin Hart was almost two years younger and was Kurian's best friend. His hay colored hair always fell straight over his face during prayer. It swayed slightly with every move of his head. The rest of their troop was younger still, most at thirteen or fourteen, with Simon being the youngest at only eleven. Simon clenched his eyes so tightly that it made him look like an old man. Kurian almost laughed.

He glanced toward the window and instantly felt the sting of the dean's instruction rod on his thigh. The stifled laugh escaped as a grunt of pain. The other boys flinched at the snap of the rod on his flesh, but did not look up.

"We ask your grace upon this day, to keep us from *foolish distraction*," Noeman continued his prayer. "Let it be." They all looked up with the ritual words, waiting for the dean's direction.

"Mr. Abramson," he said, glaring at Kurian.

"Yes, Dean Goodman?" Kurian stood at attention, his face blank.

“Your continued lack of concentration disturbs me,” said Noeman. “I wonder, sometimes, if your father was a field mouse.” Rhys and Tobin sniggered from across the circle. The dean frowned at them and continued. “Since extra shifts in the kitchen and corporal punishment have obviously been insufficient to teach you discipline, I will have to conjure up a more severe task for you. And for their outburst, Mr. Brock and Mr. Hart will join you. I want to see the three of you after your exercises.”

“Yes, Dean,” they said together. The younger boys stood still, hoping to avoid any further distribution of punishment.

“Off to the yard, now. All of you.” Noeman waved his hand toward the door to dismiss his students.

Kurian sighed and pulled back his dark curls as he walked through the door. Rhys punched him on the arm before heading up the hill to the practice ring. Kurian followed slowly. The sky was becoming lighter in the east, and already it felt like a long day. The constant gloom of the clouds did not help his mood. Even from the height of Capric, the continuous haze that hovered over the entire region made it difficult to see anything much further than a few miles away, and when standing on the plain it was difficult to see more than a mile.

The old stories said you could once see Smithfield, ten miles to the southwest, from the top of Capric. But he didn’t believe them when even Aposford, just over the dry riverbed east of the hill, would often fade from the sight of his caramel colored eyes.

This morning, however, the view of Kurian’s childhood home was almost clear. A few dim lights burned in the village. His thoughts vacillated between missing it and wishing it would vanish forever in the mist. Occasionally, he had a turn

carrying one of the brothers' bags to town for a mercy visit. It seemed there were no happier reasons to go to Aposford; only illness, death, or starvation brought the monks for a visit. No weddings had happened in Kurian's memory, but then, there were no young people in Aposford—just half-starving old farmers living by a dry river. His father was never in the square during his visits, and he had long ago stopped missing him.

His father had brought him here at the youngest possible age to avoid the fate of so many children in Aposford. Kurian knew he believed it would save him from suffering and give him the only chance for an education, but father had been wrong if he thought this was a better life.

Noeman had made it his personal goal to punish Kurian from the moment he arrived at the Capric Order on his seventh birthday—daily, if possible, and for the smallest infractions of the Rule. This was not the life father had promised when he left him at the gate. These were not the mighty warrior-priests of God from father's tales. None of them went on the adventures in their history books. Few of them went as far as the village for mercy visits. All that happened at Capric was study and training. Study the Rule, study the histories, study the Law set down so long ago. Kurian knew all of it almost by heart after ten years of lectures. It was the training that still challenged him, that kept changing as his body and strength grew. Training was what made the Caprics different from other orders, and to him, gave them greater purpose. Study prepared them to be priests to a town that would likely be empty and dead before Kurian was middle aged; training transformed them into guardians of the most valuable treasure in the ten cities of Pallingham, possibly the entire world.

Kurian reached the top of the hill, removed his robes, folded them to protect the delicate red and white tassels in the hem, and lined up with his troop. Behind them stood the younger troop of novitiates who studied under Dean Tailor. Together, they couldn't fill half of the large practice ring as they stood, shivering in their singlets. Around them, the ordained monks were beginning their own exercises in small groups, most of them under the ancient oak tree at the north end of the hilltop. The oldest of them walked the perimeter of the field, except Sage Marten, the abbot, who watched from a chair in his doorway while his personal attendant tucked a blanket around his legs. Morning exercises were a requirement for all who were able.

Michael Humphrey, the novice trainer faced them. The younger brothers called him the Blacksmith—first he heated you up until you were ready to explode, then he beat you into the shape he wanted. He seemed to like the nickname.

"Tell me, little ingots," he said, "what shall we forge you into today?"

"Warriors of Capric, sir," they all shouted.

"And how do Caprics fight?"

"Attack no man. Defend all good. Take no life if it be in your power, but protect the Treasure of Capric to the death." It was a summary of the Rule's guidance on fighting that the Blacksmith had created to remind the boys of their common purpose.

"Good. Today we train with staves." He began to pace before the line of boys. "Staves have been the favored weapon at this compound for over three hundred years. When you have earned it, your staff is your identity outside these walls. People

will recognize and welcome you because you carry a Capric staff. They wrongly believe it is our only weapon, because we have built a stout reputation upon it. Few would tussle with a Capric and his staff.” He paused, standing back at the center of their line.

“Rhys. Kurian,” the Blacksmith pointed. They both stepped forward. “As the oldest, you both had some experience with this weapon years ago. Why don’t you spar first to show the little ones how dangerous a little knowledge can be?” Michael tossed a staff to each of them while the rest of the boys retreated to the edge of the practice ring.

Kurian moved to the center of the circle and faced Rhys. They each held their staves vertically with hands together in the center, saluting their opponent, and waiting for the Blacksmith to begin the match. Rhys was over a head taller than Kurian, and easily weighed two stone more. Thick dark hair pushed out of Rhys’ singlet at the neckline. More hair spread over his strong, square chin. *When did Rhys beat me to manhood?* His extra strength was suddenly a concern.

They had sparred often before, and Kurian knew his speed and strategy usually countered Rhys’ greater strength. However, their previous matches had always been bare-fisted bouts, or wrestling with wooden daggers. His thoughts lingered for a moment on the time Rhys broke his once straight nose and he cringed at the idea of Rhys swinging an ash pole at his head.

Michael called for the match to begin. Rhys jerked the staff off the ground, caught the end in both hands, and swung the full length of it at Kurian’s left shoulder. Kurian had expected Rhys to take the offensive, but the move came so quickly, he had no time to get into a proper guard. He lifted his staff and

ducked clumsily. The blow hit his staff just above his hands and he knocked himself on the head.

Rhys was already in a full backswing, and there was no time to block. Kurian dove wildly and rolled behind his opponent. Rhys twisted his body around, continuing his swing and missing Kurian's back by inches. He felt the rod whistle between his shoulder blades. Before he could turn around, Rhys took a step forward and raised his weapon to bring it down on the back of Kurian's skull.

Kurian rolled onto his back and jabbed the butt of his staff into Rhys' gut, forcing him to double over and stumble back. Finally, Kurian had space to stand up and maneuver. He got to his feet and faced Rhys in a low guard, one hand on the butt, and the other about a third way up the staff for control.

Rhys caught his breath and looked up. His face was red, and he trembled with rage. This was the fighting style Kurian knew and expected from his friend—wild anger, without strategy or thought. The only option now was to win, or submit to a beating until the Blacksmith tore Rhys away.

Rhys screamed and charged. Kurian dropped his stance, and when Rhys made a blind swing, he sidestepped and thrust the staff between Rhys' knees. Rhys toppled face first into the sand, but his staff connected with Kurian's outstretched arm. Kurian clutched his arm while Rhys rolled on the ground. The Blacksmith stepped into the ring before Rhys stood up, ending the match.

"Brilliantly clumsy, gentlemen," he said. "Boys, did you notice how dangerous they were? Kurian was fortunate he didn't crack his own skull, while Mr. Brock the Ox enjoyed a breakfast

of sand." He turned to the combatants, "You may have some water and rest for a few moments."

Kurian and Rhys shook hands and walked to different water buckets. He knew from experience that Rhys would be in a foul mood the rest of the day after losing. Better to let him steam alone.

"A fine show," said a stranger sitting on the bench next to the water bucket. Visitors rarely came to the order, and they usually wore the robes of another monastery, not the common tunic of this man.

"I'm fortunate it wasn't bloodier," said Kurian, rubbing the side of his head, and checking his nose out of habit.

"Yes," said the stranger, "I imagine your large friend could injure even your instructor with a temper like that."

"Only if he caught the Blacksm—I mean, Master Humphrey in his sleep. Rhys could never get near enough to touch him." Kurian laughed to think of him trying.

The stranger looked across the field at Rhys with steely eyes. "A heart filled with anger is like a raging fire," he said quietly. "Your master may try to tame it in his hearth, but if a single spark strays to the thatch, it can consume a city overnight."

Kurian stared at the man. He was not as simple as he looked. His age was hard to tell; he could be almost as old as Noeman, yet he had the vibrancy of the young men ordained only a few years before. Who was this stranger? The simple clothing was obviously borrowed, for no farmer or craftsman spoke the way he did. Perhaps he was a spy, looking for a weakness in the compound's defense. Or it could be a test for his training, a seemingly simple man to try his knowledge when he was most

distracted by the thrill of the fight and the pain in his arm and head.

“What brings you to Capric?” asked Kurian.

“Perhaps the same thing that brought you, young novitiate. I have roamed the ten cities, and now I find myself here.”

“I doubt we have the same purpose then, since I have never been further than the tiny village you see across the riverbed.”

“The distance makes no matter. Though you were brought here by another, and I wandered here on my own, you still seek something, as I do.”

Kurian was surprised for a moment, but he hid it on his face by showing his suspicion. “Do you know me?”

“I know how recruits arrive at such a place.” The stranger smiled at Kurian, but his eyes looked like they held a secret. “Tell me about your order.”

“We were founded by two servants of King Frederick, one hundred twenty years before the kings at Fin fell. The river was still flowing then, and they say the sky was clear, and as blue as the mountain iris. King Frederick had recovered a great treasure and was returning to Fin. They were camped on this hill when the largest force of Ballentines ever seen attacked. Ward Finlay, head of the king’s personal guard was preparing defenses when Sage Bennett, the king’s priest, saw a vision. In it, the chest that carried the treasure sprouted roots and grew into a great tree. While it grew, one of the branches picked up the king and raised him high above the plain where he was safe from any foe and could see all the land that would hold the ten cities.

“Frederick commanded that the treasure not be moved from the spot where it lay, and that it be protected even before his

life. Ward Finlay led a few thousand men against an army of fifty thousand. Miracles followed whenever Sage Bennett opened his mouth, and when the Ballentines were finally scattered, King Frederick understood the vision from God: the treasure must remain on the hill for him to have victory and secure his rule. Sage Bennett confirmed this with a prophecy: the kingdom would plunge into an age of pestilence and war, should the treasure be removed from this hill and dishonored by the people.

“Upon hearing this, King Frederick charged both his men to spend their lives protecting the treasure and serving the people of his kingdom. Five hundred of the most faithful soldiers stayed with them to form this order and build the compound you now see. They also planted the great oak there, in the place where the vision occurred. Our leaders have always taken both the names and positions of our founders; Sage to guide us in wisdom, Ward to lead us in battle.”

“You tell the story from your histories well,” said the stranger. “I would like to know about the order now.”

“Our mission has not changed. We are still priests and warriors, as in our founding,” said Kurian.

“And how would you judge your order’s performance of that mission?” The secretive look was clear on the stranger’s face.

“There are mercy visits to the village almost monthly,” Kurian said, hearing the defensiveness in his own voice. “We pray for the people, give them bread, provide healing where we can. Visitors like yourself are welcomed and offered food, shelter, and counsel at no cost. We take nothing from any man and accept only the gifts they freely offer to God. Our food we grow, so

that we are not a burden to others. Finally, we train daily to protect the treasure entrusted to us. It is our most important task.”

“Have you seen this treasure?”

“No, no,” Kurian stammered. “I’m not even ordained. Nobody sees it except Sage Marten, who accounts for everything in this compound. And to ensure that nobody snatches a peek, Ward Farrow’s sword guards the only entrance to the treasury.”

“A large trust. You would die for this treasure you have never seen?” The man crossed his arms and leaned back on the bench.

“I swore my oath to this order before God.” Kurian stood over him, fists clenched. “Both men were elected for their fidelity and bravery.”

“Does that still the searching feeling in your heart?” the stranger whispered.

Kurian’s face burned. He didn’t care whether this was a test. “Forgive me, but I have forgotten myself. The rules of our order forbid novitiates from speaking of these things to guests without permission from the abbot,” he said, then turned around and rejoined his troop in the practice ring. He’d stretched any reading of the Rule with his excuse, but he would not have his loyalty questioned, regardless of his challenges with Noeman. It didn’t matter whether he fully believed the stories, as long as he performed his duties to the people and would give his life to protect the treasure. He had still sworn his oath to God and to the brothers. When he looked again, the man was gone from the bench, but he was not anywhere on the field. No simple farmer could disappear so quickly. Training continued with simple drills he could perform without much attention, allowing his body to follow the motions while his mind worked to

figure out who this stranger was, and whether he should mention the encounter to the dean.

“Why so serious?” Tobin asked as they walked to the dining hall for breakfast. His blue eyes peeked through the sweaty blonde strings clinging to his forehead. “Thinking about Rhys almost knocking your head off?”

“He’d have to stop swinging like a mad donkey for that to happen,” Kurian said loud enough for Rhys to hear. “Maybe if he slowed down to aim.”

“That’d be no fun,” Rhys returned. He flexed the arm carrying his robe and shook his fist. “What’s the use in training at half my strength? It’d be like Tobin only finishing half of a test.”

“He’d still score twice your better,” Kurian said, laughing. Tobin blushed and looked away from Rhys before smiling. Though they were friends, Rhys still intimidated him.

“Comparing my brain to his is like matching little Simon against the Blacksmith in the ring,” Rhys conceded. They all laughed, but cut themselves short when they saw Noeman waiting at the door.

“Gentlemen,” Noeman said, smiling at them. “You look to be in good spirits for men awaiting punishment.” None of them answered, but they all bowed their heads. “I have decided to attempt a new strategy regarding your discipline. I would have you perform two tasks for me in Aposford.” The boys looked up in shock.

“Alone, Dean?” asked Tobin.

“Alone, Mr. Hart,” said Noeman. “Mr. Abramson and Mr. Brock are only months from the age when they *could* qualify for ordination. I was, in fact, ordained only a few months older than you are, Mr. Hart, on special allowance from the former

Sage, God be with him.” Kurian bowed his head before rolling his eyes. He was so tired of the old braggart, claiming his own perfection at whatever task challenged his students. “But to the point,” Noeman continued, “I doubt they will qualify soon. My instruction seems to have done nothing to tame their contumacy, and I believe they will learn nothing unless they are tested and proved inadequate in their own minds. Tobin, I send you with them to be their good sense on my errand.”

“But sir,” Tobin objected. He looked more nervous than usual. “I haven’t been outside the gate in almost a year, and the last time...”

“Fear not, you’ve grown much since then, Mr. Hart.” Tobin did not appear comforted by the dean’s words. “Now, to my tasks. I require parchment.”

“Your punishment is to send us to town with your money?” Rhys asked, clearly holding back laughter.

“Ha. When the Apos flows again!” Noeman glared at Rhys. Kurian had never heard him use the exclamation so popular in town. “I would sooner trust a pack of dogs to guard my supper. Interrupt me again and you will see how harsh punishment can be. The tanner supplies me parchment in trade and has a bundle prepared for me. It will be simple enough for you to retrieve it and show yourselves competent errand boys. The second task will test your potential as priests.”

Tobin perked up at this news. “What do you require, Dean?”

“Service is the task. You must each find one person in the village who needs assistance and complete whatever task they ask of you. You are not to perform any service reserved for ordained monks, although if anyone requests prayer, you may relay the details to me. I demand a full report of your benevo-

lences at tomorrow's morning gathering, and I will inquire about you the next time I travel to town. Leave immediately after your breakfast, and do not return until dark, assuming you have done something noteworthy by then."



The air was warmer as the boys walked toward Aposford, warm enough that the brief walk made them sweat, which made their robes itch more than usual. They ignored the road and walked across the plain through low, springy turf that offered the only color in sight. Gray clouds covered the sky, as always, dimming the rest of the world into shades of slate and preventing them from easily telling how long they had been walking or how long remained to complete their task. With the clouds obscuring the sun, simple dark and light were the only markers of time in Pallingham, dusk and dawn the only hint that one was giving way to the other. Cutting across the grassy plain and the sparse farmlands would save them some time in travel, giving them more time to find and complete their unusual penance before dark.

Kurian remembered his frustration when he left the morning lesson. Now he thought it may have been a stronger feeling, a sense of dread about the day. Novitiates had never left the gates of the compound alone, as far as any of them knew, and it was amazing that Sage Marten had approved Noeman's errand. Normally, the next monk headed to the village took everyone's shopping lists, and older boys would go along to carry packages or attend to the monk while he performed whatever rites of

mercy the villagers needed. Sending three novices alone was unprecedented. Perhaps their old teacher was losing his mind. However, his final warning seemed to indicate that he knew the risk. He had threatened to send them away as *gyrovagues* if he heard of any misconduct. Even Rhys had shown a respectful fear toward that prospect. They had all seen that nightmare at least once—failed monks, slaves to their desires, cast off from their sworn order and banned from joining any other. Their only prospect was wandering between monasteries and living on what poor charity they could find. Clothed in rags and covered with lice, most went mad within a year. Noeman knew the power of such a threat and would not make it lightly.

“What should our first priestly task be?” Tobin asked cheerfully.

“It’s no priestly anything,” Rhys grunted. “You’re slave for a day, that’s all.”

“It’s service, even if it’s not as a priest,” Tobin said.

“I say we find the simplest thing we can,” said Rhys. “Carry some old woman’s market basket home, then duck off into the fields for a nap. Get this sackcloth robe off for a while. It feels like roaches are climbing all over me.”

Tobin looked appalled. “You’d do anything to shirk your responsibilities. I think we should look for something important to do, so we can make a good report tomorrow. Maybe the town elders could find a task that Noeman would approve.” Tobin stumbled, stopping him from making a full speech. Rhys nudged him, and Tobin flailed to keep his balance.

“The whole town is elders,” Rhys said.

“You’re both right,” said Kurian. “We must return with a good report, but we don’t want to run around the entire village all day.”

“What’s your idea, then?” Rhys said.

“We help the most people we can with the least effort. If we stand at the well, people come to us. We prevent strain to aging backs, which the dean will appreciate, and we get to stay in one place.”

“Good idea,” said Rhys. His half-cocked smile told Kurian that he was no longer sore about the morning match.

Aposford nestled into a bend in the riverbed where the water had once slowed to a shallow crawl, though nobody in the village remembered a time when the river flowed. The persistent clouds that hung low over the plain offered just enough rain and light for a meager crop from the orchards, but the village had slowly died along with the river. Before that, it boomed from the trade that flowed with the water. All the towns and villages of the delta had brought their goods through Aposford on their way to the king’s city at Fin. As the town expanded, it straddled the river, reaching close to Capric hill, and many of the merchants could do just as well selling in Aposford than continuing to the capital. A bridge stood as the only reminder of the western side of the town, which had burned down in the same year of drought that dried up the water. The destruction of Fin had been a blow to trade, but the death of the river brought the town to squalor. Only one small road passed through Aposford—not counting the riverbed—making it difficult to transport goods in large quantities. The drought had decimated the fruit and cattle that were their only resources. In two generations, what was left of the town shrank by half. The

people scattered among the ten cities. Those that remained were too old to begin again. They lived out their days in crumbling houses, without the materials or strength to repair them.

The boys had crossed the stone bridge and gone directly to the well near the village center. At first, their task seemed minor—a few villagers came to draw water and were grateful for the help. But word spread quickly and soon they had a line of people waiting for them to fill whatever containers they had brought. The growl in their stomachs told them they had worked through lunch before the crowd finally drifted away. Rhys amused himself by drawing two buckets at a time to show off for the few stragglers who came later. Tobin made him break out in laughter when he caught a full bucket on the stone edge of the well and dumped the water on himself and the woman next to him. Kurian sat on the edge of an empty fountain, eating a roll of bread.

“I think it’s time to retrieve our package,” he said and stood up. “I’ll return shortly.”

“Why do you get to go?” asked Rhys.

“Because I know where the tanner lives.”

Rhys opened his mouth, and then closed it with no response. “Let him go,” said Tobin, “he’s been moody all day. I think that blow to the head this morning knocked the humor from him.”

Rhys laughed, then slapped himself on the side of the head and put on his best pout.

“If you need me,” said Kurian, “it’s just down this street, then the third left.” He walked off in the direction he had pointed, hearing his friends talking and laughing until he made the turn. His suggestion to draw water at the well gave him the best chance to slip away for his own errand.

He stopped at the tanner's house only long enough to pick up the parchment, but he noticed the light fading when he came out. Hurrying, he jogged further down the street until he came to his father's house. In ten years, he had not come back to his childhood home and had only seen his father in passing when he had been allowed to come on his first mercy visit at twelve. A few other times he had seen him from a distance, but during the last few years, his father had not ventured out on days when Kurian came to Aposford. He took it as a necessary part of his new life, and his oath to the order. But frustration with the order had only grown after his conversation with the stranger; he needed to speak to his father again, to ask him why he had given his son to an order that was nothing like his stories.

Surely, his father knew that the order was a shadow of its former strength and honor. He must have seen that they made only the occasional visit to the village, and no grand quests. Or maybe his father was too simple to understand, blinded by the stories and legends about the Caprics. Perhaps he believed that their tutelage would lead to his son's greatness, or at least let him avoid the life of a cobbler's son in a dying town, or conscription into Lord Evasius' army at Pallingham castle. He needed to know. He would ask his father and find the answer in his face.

Before lifting his hand to knock, he heard someone running toward him and then Tobin shouted his name. His face was white with panic. As soon as their eyes met, he waved his arm for Kurian to follow, and ran back down the street. Kurian took off after him, fearing what might have happened with Rhys and

Tobin alone. If Rhys had been goaded into a fight, they would all be cast to wander and slowly go mad as *gyrovagues*.

The thought tore at his heart that he might lose his home, and more importantly, his life as a guardian because Rhys couldn't control his temper. As he turned back onto the main street, he looked up and his heart sank. His legs refused to run, slowing until he stood unmoving in the street. At the edge of sight, black smoke rose from Capric hill.