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Assumption Samutprakarn School

Age: 17 years old.

### The Verdant Sentinels

Dusk drew near, and Elynna's heart could not stop palpitating.

On her fifth birthday, she received her first bow as a present; on her seventh birthday, she shot her first arrow; on her fourteenth birthday, she crafted her first bow; on her seventeenth birthday, she hunted her first game.

It was as if she was fated to become a ranger, to serve under the canopy of the forests of her homeland Nrennore, and under the name of the Verdant Sentinels, the ranger ranks of the capital. Destined or not, however, Elynna knew she still had one test left she must pass—the Dulaar.

Named after the first ranger of the ranks, the Dulaar was the final test one must pass to join the Verdant Sentinels. It consisted of setting off at dusk into the Emerald Woods, located west of the capital, and making one's way to the heart of the woods in which lay Shalanaar, the woods' biggest tree whose height was the double of the tallest spires in the capital. Then, one must climb to the uppermost branch of Shalanaar and blow Fauncern's Horn, made from the horn of the legendary beast Fauncern, for all to hear before dawn.

The Dulaar, however, could only be taken by one person per trimester. That person must be chosen by the Verdant General and deemed worthy enough by other rangers in the ranks.

Elynna was that person this trimester, and she could not afford to fail.

Footsteps emanating from the Virescent Lodge, the main quarter of the Verdant Sentinels, brought her back to the present. Elynna stood there, alarmed, as a figure descended the steps towards her.

Approaching her was a ranger clad in a green hooded cloak, leather, and cloth—the standard Verdant Sentinels attire. It was when Elynna's eyes met the ranger's that she realized she had forgotten something and quickly knelt down onto one knee.

"Rise, Elynna Goldshade," the ranger said, having stopped in front of her. Hearing this, Elynna rose to her feet.

"As the Verdant General, I, Erdrynn Swiftgale, admire you for making it this far," Erdrynn said. "However, your journey to become a ranger is not yet over." Erdrynn raised his arm to the side, signaling to a pair of female rangers guarding the entrance of the lodge. One of them disappeared inside before emerging moments later, wielding a horn the size of a person's torso.

*Faucern's Horn*, Elynna thought as the ranger walked over and handed the horn to Erdrynn before returning to resume her sentry duty.

"One of Dulaar's teachings, passed down from one generation to another, is to always remember that the ground is there for you to push yourself back onto your feet whenever you fall," Erdrynn said. He passed *Faucern's Horn* to Elynna who then strapped the object to her back. It was at this moment that the clock tower bells chimed, signifying dusk.

Elynna's breathing paused.

"Now go, and do not disappoint me."

The Dulaar had begun.

Wasting no time, Elynna turned around and broke into a sprint, heading for the western gates. Within few minutes of exiting the capital, the initial rush of adrenaline died down and Elynna found herself surrounded by a mass of green-leaved trees. Slowing down to conserve energy, she began trekking through the undergrowth of the Emerald Woods.

It was when stars began to light up the darkening azure that Elynna heard the sound of running water nearby. Coming out of the thicket, she saw a river flowing through the woods. It was wide and deep enough that swimming was required to get across. Knowing what she needed to do, Elynna walked down to the river bank and entered the water.

Her leather attire and the heavy horn on her back made the swim an ordeal which sapped her of energy. It drained her so much that the first thing she did after reaching the other side was to gasp for air while on all fours. It took Elynna many minutes for her breathing to return to normal before she could continue.

One of the traits of being an elf was being able to see as clearly as day during the night, and Elynna was grateful for this ability. It helped her avoid tripping over fallen twigs and small rocks and eliminated the need for torches. It also made her able to locate the end of the thicket after a short trek. When she emerged from the trees, expecting to find Shalanaar, however, Elynna saw only one thing.

It was dread.

In front of her was a gorge dividing the woods into two. It was deep and seemed to stretch into the distance indefinitely. This meant the only way to get across was to climb down to the bottom of the gorge and climb up again to the other side. The realization dawned on her, and for the first time in her life, an alien thought crossed her mind.

*Just give up.*

Elynna quickly shook the thought from her head and instead tried to focus on the obstacle in front of her. She pulled out a pair of pitons and walked to the cliff's edge. Bracing herself, she began to descend, turning around to face the cliff and striking a piton into the rocky surface.

She took not only an hour to reach the bottom, but also great concentration, strength, and resolve. Standing alone in the gorge, Elynna was shaking visibly from the descent. Wanting to get the torture over with, she pushed down her anguish and prepared to climb up.

It was midnight when she found herself in front of Shalanaar. Instead of being ready to take on any challenge, Elynna was drained both physically and mentally.

Her only obstacle left was to climb to the tallest branch of Shalanaar, using the vines that covered the tree trunk. Judging by Elynna's condition, however, she was not in any shape to do it. When she limped forward to get closer to the tree, her foot tripped over one of Shalanaar's roots.

And then she fell.

*I cannot do it.*

Despair.

*It's not possible.*

It was when she was about to pass out that a familiar voice rang in her head.

*"One of Dulaar's teachings,"*

*Huh?*

*"...passed down from one generation to another,"*

*Erdrynn?*

*"...is to always remember,"*

*Remember what?*

*"...that the ground is there for you to push yourself back onto your feet whenever you fall."*

Yes, Dulaar's teaching. No matter how many times she fell, she must get back up. No matter how painful and daunting it could be, she must get back up.

The thoughts renewed some of her energy, almost enough for her to push herself back onto her feet. She needed just one more surge of strength, however, just one more push.

Just a little more—

*"Now go, and do not disappoint me."*

Dawn drew near as the first rays of sunlight began to light up the kingdom of Nrennore. Atop Shalanaar, a female elf could be seen holding a large horn in her hands. Planting one of her feet forward on the tallest branch of Shalanaar, she put the horn to her lips and, inhaling deeply, blew, creating a sound which resonated throughout the land.

She did not give up.

She moved forward.