



DAVID AND LEIGH

THE PREQUEL TO
THE BELGARIAD

EDDINGS

BELGARATH THE
SORCERER



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Prologue

It was well past midnight and very cold. The moon had risen, and her pale light made the frost crystals lying in the snow sparkle like carelessly strewn diamonds. In a peculiar way it seemed to Garion almost as if the snow-covered earth were reflecting the starry sky overhead.

"I think they're gone now," Durnik said, peering upward. His breath steamed in the icy, dead-calm air.

"I can't see that rainbow any more."

"Rainbow?" Belgarath asked, sounding slightly amused.

"You know what I mean. Each of them has a different-colored light.

Aldur's is blue, Issa's is green, Chaldan's is red, and the others all have different colors. Is there some significance to that?"

"It's probably a reflection of their different personalities,"

Belgarath replied.

"I can't be entirely positive, though. My Master and I never got around to discussing it." He stamped his feet in the snow.

"Why don't we go back?" he suggested.

"It's cold out here."

They turned and started back down the hill toward the cottage, their feet crunching in the frozen snow. The farmstead at the foot of the hill looked warm and comforting. The thatched roof of the cottage was thick with snow, and the icicles hanging from the eaves glittered in the moon light. The outbuildings Durnik had constructed were dark, but the windows of the cottage were all aglow with golden lamplight that spread softly out over the mounded snow in the yard. A column of blue-grey wood-smoke rose straight and unwavering from the chimney, rising, it seemed, to the very stars.

It probably had not really been necessary for the three of them to accompany their guests to the top of the hill to witness their departure, but it

was Durnik's house, and Durnik was a Sendar. Sendars are meticulous about proprieties and courtesies.

"Eriond's changed," Garion noted as they neared the bottom of the hill.

"He seems more certain of himself now."

Belgarath shrugged.

"He's growing up. It happens to everybody--except to Belar, maybe. I don't think we can ever expect Belar to grow up."

"Belgarath!" Durnik sounded shocked.

"That's no way for a man to speak about his God!"

"What are you talking about?"

"What you just said about Belar. He's the God of the Alorns, and you're an Alorn, aren't you?"

"Whatever gave you that peculiar notion? I'm no more an Alorn than you are."

"I always thought you were. You've certainly spent enough time with them."

"That wasn't my idea. My Master gave them to me about five thousand years ago. There were a number of times when I tried to give them back, but he wouldn't hear of it."

"Well, if you're not an Alorn, what are you?"

"I'm not really sure. It wasn't all that important to me when I was young. I do know that I'm not an Alorn. I'm not crazy enough for that."

"Grandfather!" Garion protested.

"You don't count, Garion. You're only half Alorn."

They reached the door of the cottage and carefully stamped the snow off their feet before entering. The cottage was Aunt Pol's domain, and she had strong feelings about people who tracked snow across her spotless floors.

The interior of the cottage was warm and filled with golden lamplight that reflected from the polished surfaces of Aunt Pol's copper-bottomed pots and kettles and pans hanging from hooks on either side of the arched

fireplace. Durnik had built the table and chairs in the center of the room out of oak, and the lamplight enhanced the golden color of the wood.

The three of them immediately went to the fireplace to warm their hands and feet.

The door to the bedroom opened, and Poledra came out.

"Well," she said, "did you see them off?"

"Yes, dear," Belgarath replied.

"They were going in a generally northeasterly direction the last time I looked."

"How's Pol?" Durnik asked.

"Happy," Garion's tawny-haired grandmother replied.

"That's not exactly what I meant. Is she still awake?"

Poledra nodded.

"She's lying in bed admiring her handiwork."

"Would it be all right if I looked in on her?"

"Of course. Just don't wake the babies."

"Make a note of that, Durnik," Belgarath advised.

"Not waking those babies is likely to become your main purpose in life for the next several months."

Durnik smiled briefly and went into the bedroom with Poledra.

"You shouldn't tease him that way, Grandfather," Garion chided.

"I wasn't teasing, Garion. Sleep's very rare in a house with twins.

One of them always seems to be awake. Would you like something to drink? I think I can probably find Pol's beer barrel."

"She'll pull out your beard if she catches you in her pantry."

"She isn't going to catch me, Garion. She's too busy being a mother right now." The old man crossed the room to the pantry and began rummaging around.

Garion pulled off his cloak, hung it on a wooden peg, and went back to the fireplace. His feet still felt cold. He looked up at the latticework of rafters overhead. It was easy to see that Durnik had crafted them. The smith's meticulous attention to detail showed in everything he did. The rafters were exposed over this central room, but there was a loft over the bedroom and a flight of stairs reaching up to it along the back wall.

"Found it," Belgarath called triumphantly from the pantry.

"She tried to hide it behind the flour barrel."

Garion smiled. His grandfather could probably find a beer cask in the dark at the bottom of a coal mine.

The old man came out with three brimming tankards, set them down on the table, and moved a chair around until it faced the fireplace. Then he took one of the tankards, sat, and stretched his feet out toward the fire.

"Pull up a chair, Garion," he invited.

"We might as well be comfortable."

Garion did that.

"It's been quite a night," he said.

"That it has, boy," the old man replied.

"That it has."

"Shouldn't we say good night to Aunt Pol?"

"Durnik's with her. Let's not disturb them. This is a special sort of time for married people."

"Yes," Garion agreed, remembering that night two weeks ago when his daughter had been born.

"Will you be going back to Riva soon?"

"I probably should," Garion replied.

"I think I'll wait a few days, though--at least until Aunt Pol's back on her feet again."

"Don't wait too long," Belgarath advised with a sly grin.

"Ce'Nedra's sitting on the throne all by herself right now, you know."

"She'll be all right. She knows what to do."

"Yes, but do you want her doing things on her own?"

"Oh, I don't think she'll declare war on anybody while I'm gone."

"Maybe not, but with Ce'Nedra you never really know, do you?"

"Quit making fun of my wife, Grandfather."

"I'm not making fun of her. I love her dearly, but I do know her. All I'm saying is that she's a little unpredictable." Then the old sorcerer sighed.

"Is something the matter, Grandfather?"

"I was just chewing on some old regrets. I don't think you and Durnik realize just how lucky you are. I wasn't around when my twins were born.

I was off on a business trip."

Garion knew the story, of course.

"You didn't have any choice, Grandfather," he said.

"Aldur ordered you to go to Mallorea. It was time to recover the Orb from Torak, and you had to go along to help Cherek Bear-shoulders and his sons."

"Don't try to be reasonable about it, Garion. The bald fact is that I abandoned my wife when she needed me the most. Things might have turned out very differently if I hadn't."

"Are you still feeling guilty about that?"

"Of course I am. I've been carrying that guilt around for three thousand years. You can hand out all the royal pardons you want, but it's still there."

"Grandmother forgives you."

"Naturally she does. Your grandmother's a wolf, and wolves don't hold grudges. The whole point, though, is that she can forgive me, and you can forgive me, and you can get up a petition signed by everybody in the known world that forgives me, but I still won't forgive myself. Why don't we talk about something else?"

Durnik came back out of the bedroom.

"She's asleep," he said softly.

Then he went to the fireplace and stacked more wood on the embers.

"It's a cold night out there," he noted.

"Let's keep this fire going."

"I should have thought of that," Garion apologized.

"Are the babies still asleep?" Belgarath asked the smith.

Durnik nodded.

"Enjoy it while you can. They're resting up."

Durnik smiled. Then he too pulled a chair closer to the fire.

"Do you remember what we were talking about earlier?" he asked, reaching for the remaining tankard on the table.

"We talked about a lot of things," Belgarath told him.

"I mean the business of the same things happening over and over again.

What happened tonight isn't one of those, is it?"

"Would it come as a surprise to you if I told you that Pol isn't the first to give birth to twins?"

"I know that, Belgarath, but this seems different somehow. I get the feeling that this isn't something that's happened before. This seems like something new to me. This has been a very special night. UL

himself blessed it. Has that ever happened before?"

"Not that I know of," the old sorcerer conceded.

"Maybe this is something new. If it is, it's going to make things a little strange for us."

"How's that?" Garion asked.

"The nice thing about repetitions is that you sort of know what to expect. If everything did stop when the "accident" happened, and now it's all moving again, we'll be breaking into new territory."

"Won't the prophecies give us some clues?"

Belgarath shook his head.

"No. The last passage in the Mrin Codex reads,

"And there shall come a great light, and in that light shall that which was broken be healed, and interrupted Purpose shall proceed again, as was from the beginning intended." All the other prophecies end in more or less the same way. The Ashabine Oracles even use almost exactly the same words. Once that light reached Korim, we were on our own."

"Will there be a new set of prophecies now?" Durnik asked.

"Next time you see Eriond, why don't you ask him? He's the one in charge now." Belgarath sighed.

"I don't think we'll be involved in any new ones, though. We've done what we were supposed to do." He smiled just a bit wryly.

"To be perfectly frank about it, I'm just as glad to pass it on. I'm getting a little old to be rushing out to save the world.

It was an interesting career right at first, but it gets exhausting after the first six or eight times."

"That'd be quite a story," Durnik said.

"What would?"

"Everything you've been through--saving the world, fighting Demons, pushing the Gods around, things like that."

"Tedious, Durnik. Very, very tedious,"

Belgarath disagreed.

"There were long periods when nothing was happening. You can't make much of a story out of a lot of people just sitting around waiting."

"Oh, I'm sure there were enough lively parts to keep it interesting.

Someday I'd really like to hear the whole thing--you know, how you met Aldur, what the world was like before Torak cracked it, how you and Cherek Bear-shoulders stole the Orb back--all of it."

Belgarath laughed.

"If I start telling that story, we'll still be sitting here a year from now, and we won't even be halfway through by then. We've all got better things to do."

"Do we really, Grandfather?" Garion asked.

"You just said that our part of this is over. Wouldn't this be a good time to sum it all up?"

"What good would it do? You've got a kingdom to run, and Durnik's got this farm to tend. You've got more important things to do than sit around listening to me tell stories."

"Write it down, then." The notion suddenly caught fire in Garion's mind.

"You know, Grandfather, the more I think about it, the more I think you ought to do just that. You've been here since the very beginning.

You're the only one who knows the whole story. You really should write it down, you know. Tell the world what really happened."

Belgarath's expression grew pained.

"The world doesn't care, Garion. All I'd do is offend a lot of people.

They've got their own preconceptions, and they're happy with them. I'm not going to spend the next fifty years scribbling on scraps of paper just so that people can travel to the Vale from the other side of the world to argue with me. Besides, I'm not a historian. I don't mind telling stories, but writing them down doesn't appeal to me. If I took on a project like that, my hand would fall off after a couple of years."

"Don't be coy, Grandfather. Durnik and I both know that you don't have to do it by hand. You can think the words onto paper without ever picking up a pen."

"Forget it," Belgarath said shortly.

"I'm not going to waste my time on something as ridiculous as that."

"You're lazy, Belgarath," Durnik accused.

"Are you only just noticing that? I thought you were more observant."

"You won't do it then?" Garion demanded.