

Prolog – The Mission

There once was a kingdom, consisting of 12 countries, which was home to many peoples. There were soft, green hills but also steep and rocky mountains. There were cold fjords in the midst of snow and hot beaches bordered a jungle. There were big, rugged warriors and small, silly fishermen. There were terrifying, greedy giants and friendly, joyful islanders. This kingdom was called Twelven. And Beletosta was the capital city of this colorful, diverse empire. Of course there was also a castle. And knights. And a noble damsel. And the king – as a matter of fact. And he sat in his chamber and had a very top secretive talk with someone he trusted. Do you mean it was his personal adviser? No, it was not him. Do you mean it was his general? No, it wasn't him either. It was ... his jester.

He was just doing gymnastic exercises on the king's bed – he would always do something, he just couldn't sit still – and then he finally sat down on his majesty's linen chest. The jester listened to the urgent secret he shared.

"My dear Krawuz," the king worryingly spoke, "I want to send you on a mission to accomplish a very important task!"

Oh no, the court jester thought, my fun here is over with.

"My kingdom is in great need!" Unlike a king should act he paced up and down the chamber nervously.

"Once again a very mighty enemy is at our border. It is no surprise that it is the deceitful king Dorkentok, from our dark neighboring country Grottania."

"Ah, he is like snuff to us," Krawuz felt like making a funny comment. "We will breathe him into one nostril and blow it out of the other one, haha."

The warning look and the high eyebrows were a hinting sign for the jester to be quiet. "Our wall at the border to Grottania was always sufficient and able to keep him out of our realm. Now it seems the wall is giving in and it cannot be repaired quick enough to make up for the destruction. No one knows why it has changed. It must be one of his new schemes!" The king took a deep breath.

The jester could see it was difficult for the ruler to admit the next issue. "Unfortunately, we are also being threatened from within our walls. I was informed that our people are more and more discouraged and complain about me. It will not take a lot to make them all stand against us."

He continued with hesitation. "Then we are lost."

The jester thought he was having an awful dream. A minute ago the world appeared to be a better place. Now, all of a sudden, the king was prophesying a catastrophe. "But your majesty," the surprised jester spoke up, "what shall we do now?"

The king took a deep breath again, as if he needed more oxygen for his next sentence. "We must approach king Livencraft from the northern realm and seek his help!"

Krawuz didn't understand. He had heard of the northern kingdom before but never had he heard that name being mentioned.

The king saw his confused look and explained his thought. "Oh yes, you do not know him. He is very powerful and there was a time when we were very close. He can also be a very harsh king, but he is just. He will expect something in return for his granted help." Krawuz asked, "What will he expect, your highness?"

The king stopped pacing from one chair to the other and abruptly turned his head toward the joker. The king's look was serious when he gave a short answer, "Gems."

Krawuz wonderingly repeated this answer, "Gems?"

"Yes, the most valuable ones we have." The king confirmed.

"But your majesty," the jester allowed himself to talk back due to all his amazement, "Our country does not have any gems, we might find gold and silver, but no gems!"

"Oh, but we do have gems!" The king answered, "They are hidden very well and that is indeed what makes them so valuable!"

The king said so and therefore it must have been true. After all he was king. If the king says something, it is true – even if it really isn't true. But that is a different story.

"My jester, I am sending you on a mission with my scholar Wisbert, Jogodt, head of the army, and my best guard, Ronder. Together, I want you to find the 24 greatest gems of all 12 countries of my kingdom. Bring them to king Livencraft as payment for his help. I have great trust in you. You might be my court jester, but I know you are no fool. You understand more than some of our most knowledgeable people. You are clever! And you have the ability to solve mysteries. My jester, Wisbert will lead you through all countries. He knows all the secrets and is the best explorer. My head of army, Jogodt, will find the right way and my best guard, Ronder, will protect you. Pack your things, only take with you what you can carry, we are running out of time. When you are ready go to Jogodt!"

Being a joker was his nature, he archly asked, "But your majesty, what if I take more than I can carry?"

The king's mean look gave away that he was not in a joking mood. The court jester, who was now an envoy, split the scene as fast as he could. He was headed into the greatest adventure of his life.