

## Chapter 3 The Titans

As massive as they were, Adam did not sense that they posed any threat. Just the opposite – they seemed to be the ones who could provide safety in this strange world, which was proving to be as dangerous as it was unpredictable.

"Good morning. My name is Adam. Would it be okay if I join you?"

"You would be a fool not to," came the terse reply. Such a response would normally have seemed arrogant, but Adam was not in the least put off by it. He felt inferior in every way to these towering beings, yet had nothing but admiration and even awe in their presence. With them, he would finally be safe.

Adam was quick to accept the offer, and wanted to say something to express his admiration of these men.

"I would love to join you. I have been continually attacked ever since I came into this world. But I can tell I will be safe with you." Then Adam added, "Looking at you, I get the feeling we might be having some roasted wolf for dinner tonight."

Adam let out a forced chuckle, more to let them know that he was joking than anything else – the sad duty of failed humor. But the men were thoroughly unamused. Their stone faces seemed almost incapable of anything other than seriousness. Adam had never met anyone so utterly humorless as these men seemed to be, and wondered if they were even capable of smiling.

"Where are you going?" Adam inquired.

The tallest one answered, "Toward the field beyond the forest."

"That is where I came from," Adam said.

The men were puzzled. "If you were already at the field, why did you travel toward the river? Strength comes by moving east, toward the field. Traveling west, toward the river, is why you are so small and weak."

Adam was not insulted by the remark. He couldn't argue with the fact that these people were far superior to him in every way. Most astonishing was the ease with which they walked in the direction of the field. Whenever Adam had tried to turn back toward field, the wind was so overpowering he could scarcely make it a few steps. Even as formidable as these men were, he was still amazed that they could make progress against the mighty wind.

"Oh right," sneered the titan, "the '*great wind*' ," and they burst into laughter.

*I guess they are capable of laughter after all*, Adam thought to himself, but as loud as the laugh was, it was still utterly devoid of humor. It was a laugh of pure disdain.

The titans seemed surprised when Adam didn't join them in their laughter.

"Oh, you were serious? You believe in the great wind? You're not one of those cottage people, are you?"

The tone of the question made it clear that anything other than a wholehearted repudiation of the cottage people would be unacceptable, and extracted from Adams lips, almost involuntarily, the words, "of course not."

"You're lucky we found you," said one of the titans. He was a muscular figure, more so than the others. With black hair and stern blue eyes, he had a powerful square jaw and spoke with commanding authority. "You were headed straight for the river. The west side of the river is where the cottage people live. If you crossed the river, you would have been overrun by them."

"Have you ever been on the other side?" Adam asked.

"Yes, I used to be one of the cottage people. I lived over there for years, and I assure you they are evil people. Their beliefs are nothing but fantasy – the myths of the cottage."

"So you have seen the cottage? Have you been inside?" asked Adam, with increasing interest.

“Yes, I have been through every square inch of that hopeless, condemned shack, and I can assure you, it’s only value is that of a curious, historical site. The uneducated believe in magical colors and unseen powers because they don’t understand how the world works. With a little reading, one grows beyond such childishness.”

The titan spoke with such dogmatic certainty and such deep contempt that Adam was convinced, and was ashamed that he had been so gullible.

But the question remained in Adam’s mind, how did these men advance toward the field so easily, when his own attempts had been so fruitless? As he watched them walk, he saw that it was effortless for them. Not even a little struggle. For them, it seemed, there really was no wind.

Adam fell in behind them, and, in their company, he found that for the first time he was able to make some progress against the wind. He still felt it, but the longer they walked, the weaker the wind became until, at last, he felt not even this slightest breeze.

When he was with Ranon, the cottage seemed to hold so much appeal, a fact that now embarrassed Adam. With these men, the field held the appeal, and Adam realized that the colors that he thought he saw in the cottage were the product of his own imagination. The cottage was nothing but a broken down, worthless, empty structure.

The titans explained to him how many people had come to great harm because of their fantasies about the cottage. Some drowned in the river, many were injured trying to climb up the other side of the canyon, and those who made it to the cottage were transformed into mindless, backward, superstitious idiots who were a danger to all.

That hardly seemed to describe Ranon, but Adam now felt relieved that he never did meet Ranon’s friends on the other side, lest he be drawn in to their silly superstitions and become subject to the evil spells of the cottage.

These titans were so highly educated, and so sure of themselves, that their approval now mattered more to Adam than anything else. He could not bear to be thought a fool by such intelligent men.

The journey back through the meadow was uneventful. Adam did see the wolves several times, but there must have been some kind of arrangement between these great men and vicious beasts. The wolves never attacked or even threatened, and the men appeared unaware that the wolves were even there.

The journey east proved to be much quicker and easier than the westward trek had been. They were already approaching the forest, and from this side, it actually looked inviting, not foreboding.

As they drew near to the first outcropping of trees, Adam's companions suddenly stopped short and arrayed themselves in a formation as if approaching a threatening army. Adam crouched down and looked through their legs to see what could have evoked such a response.

Adam was shocked by what he saw. There was no one there but a child, perhaps seven or eight years old, sitting under one of the trees playing with some toys made of old, splintered wood. The child seemed to hardly notice the approaching group, but the titans most certainly noticed the boy. They quickly surrounded him as if preparing to attack. The leader of the titans transformed into a massive grizzly bear. Two others became mountain lions, two became leopards, and the rest, a grotesque cross between wild boar and hyena. At once, they all rushed on the boy, teeth bared, with such vicious growls and roars that it frightened Adam. He would have run, but what kind of coward would leave a little child to be attacked by wild animals? He should help somehow. But how? Adam couldn't have done anything against this group when they were human. What could he possibly do against ferocious animals?

The smaller, and quicker, of the two mountain lions was the first to reach the boy. It lunged, dug its claws into the boy's flesh, and in an instant its jaws were around his neck. That same moment the other mountain lion took hold of the child's right leg. The little one was about to be ripped to pieces and Adam could do nothing to help him. He couldn't bear to watch any longer.

But just as he turned his eyes away, blood curdling screams reached his ears. They were not screams of the child, however. It was the first mountain lion. The child had taken one of his toys and slashed the creature's throat. At first Adam thought the toys were made out of old pieces of wood, but the one in his hand now was clearly made of metal. It was about 6 inches long, pointed, and razor-sharp on both sides, and when the light hit it, the glint of the blade reflected colors like the ones Adam remembered seeing briefly that day when he got a glimpse of the colors of the cottage. The dagger in his right hand looked to be made of gold, and in his left, another made of silver. The colors from the blades were spectacular and brilliant - even blinding at times as they flashed through the air in a blur. With speed and skill unlike anything Adam had ever seen, the child sent both mountain lions limping away, bleeding and severely injured.

This child seemed to have superhuman strength and speed.

Just then the bear, who was charging from behind, hit the child with such force that the daggers flew from his hands and the boy disappeared under the crushing weight of the giant grizzly. Without his daggers, the boy was back to the strength of a normal child, and was utterly helpless.

Then another child, a girl, perhaps a year or two younger than the boy, emerged from the trees. Clearly afraid and trembling, she reached for another one of the toys - a small, wooden hammer. She placed the toy hammer

in the hand of the boy, and, very deliberately, closed his fingers around the handle.

At first, he seemed resistant. She would close his fingers around the hammer, and he would let them fall open again, dropping the toy. But she would place it back in his palm and once again, with increasing insistence, and close his fingers around the handle.

Finally his will embraced hers and he tightened his grip around the splintered wood. He could only swing the hammer a few inches, as he was pinned under the bear, and so the hammer struck the bear with so little force that it was doubtful the bear would even notice the tap. But to Adam's amazement, the action sent the bear tumbling off the boy and slamming hard into a tree trunk, shaking the tree, and breaking the bear's back.

With two or three more swings, once again with amazing skill and speed, the rest of the beasts were vanquished, and the boy turned, offered his hand to the girl, and helped her up with a look of gratitude that could not be put into words. She responded only with a sweet, silent smile that moved Adam to his soul, even though it was not directed to him.

The two turned and started toward Adam, but now they were no longer children. It was Ranon and a woman. Ranon approached Adam with a look of deep concern, but Adam didn't notice. His eyes were fixed upon the woman. He had never seen such stunning beauty.