

Armor Propre
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Tenon bit her lower lip and studied her image in the steel mirror. Sighing, she turned sideways to examine her profile.

"That's gorgeous," her companion, Brunea, growled enviously.

"I know," Teri groaned. She turned, tugged at the waist, "It's sooo beautiful."

"It was made for you madam, and the price..."

Both women glared menacingly at the brawny clerk. "If you need me, just call," he excused himself hastily. "I'm Surelle."

"I can't wear this!" Terion exclaimed, tossing her head impatiently. "It's too expensive and too provocative. I'd be making a target of myself." Her eyes filled with regret. "It's magnificent." Longingly, she ran her hands down the sleek sides, "But it's just not me."

"Oooh yes it is." Brunea said firmly. "Sureties right, much as I hate to admit it. This might have been made to your measure. Besides, it'll be good for your career."

Teri shrugged, then grinned slowly. Her career had endured a disastrous slump after she slain a wizard she was supposed to be guarding. Now she'd finally made lieutenant and was looking for something special to mark the occasion.

"Y'know what's making this so hard?" she asked. "I've always dreamed of owning something like this." Teri traced the gold filigree at the neck with a reverent finger. "Ooohh I want it!" She laughed.

"Ask your man's opinion," Brunea suggested, jerking a thumb over her shoulder. "Bet he agrees you should have it."

Terion raised her brows over the phrase "your man," knowing that Feric would object to it. But a warm inward glow told her that she approved. She glanced in the mirror at the advanced reflection of her companion-pet wizards-lover, friend. Mine, she thought and smiled.

Feric came towards them, his nose leading the rest of his face like the prow of a ship, dark unruly hair bobbing with his ungainly walk, fine brown eyes dreaming. He carried in his arms their week's allotment of supplies; so loaded that boxes and parcels looked ready to spill in all directions.

"Well!" Brunea demanded in a bark that made Feric jump. "Whaddaya think?"

Terion turned to face him, her blue eyes shining.

"That one over there will do just as well," she said quickly, pointing to a dully gleaming breastplate. She stood straight so that he could get a better look at her. "This one costs a hundred gis more." Her face wore a guilty expression, but her hand stroked yearningly down the glossy armor.

Feric examined her, his lips pursed, eyes narrowed in judgement, highly flattered that she seek his counsel about something like this. Teri knew he'd no understanding of armor or its quality. He'd told her as much when she expressed the need for a new breastplate before facing the Duke's forces in battle. He appreciated most of all her willingness to let it go, much as he obviously wanted it, if he agreed they couldn't afford it.

And it was too extravagant, well above the limit they'd set.

Teasing her, he stretched out the moment, examining the beautifully made armor she wore. It was enamelled black, with lapped tassets falling to the sides, the whole surface heavily scrolled with exquisite gold tracery.

He liked it. The dramatic color set off her red-gold hair and handsome face.

"Well, my love," he watched her color slightly at the endearment, "if this can be had for only a hundred gis more I think you should take it."

Terion laughed and clapped battle scarred hands delightedly.

Brunea leaned over, pinched Feric's cheek and growled, "You're a prize, you are. Even y'are a wizardling." She winked at Teri. "I'll go hunt up Surelle."

Feric rubbed his cheek.

"Could you ask her to stop doing that?" he whispered. "I'll be able to whistle with my mouth closed if she keeps it up!"

Teri just grinned at him.

"Thank you," she said simply, her eyes glowing with affection. Then with enthusiasm, "Brunea's right, you know. This will help my career. It speaks of confidence and that'll automatically win a bit more respect."

"Because you look so well?" Feric asked, his eyes admiring.

Terion laughed. "Because it says I can hold my own against anybody. Mercenaries make their kit from armor won on the field, so half the young hot-heads out there will be after me wasps after honey. The fact I'd dare to wear something like this says I think I'm good enough to keep it." She examined her reflection. "Brunea's right, I'm ready to make that statement."

Terion failed to notice Feric's dawning horror.

"You mean," he asked, appalled, "you'll be in more danger because of this?"

"Love," she said and threw a muscular arm around his slim shoulders, "in this business, more than in any other, timidity doesn't pay. I think that what I stand to gain more than outweighs the added risk." She smiled at his worried expression. "Trust me, Feric, I'll profit from this." She looked at herself once more and frowned. "The rest of my kit won't match," she said unhappily. "At the very least I should have black trousers."

"You have!" he said.

"But they're so shabby."

"Excuse me, we are talking about going to battle here, aren't we? With the usual blood, dirt, and grass-stains, yes? Not a royal tea-am I correct?" Feric thrust his chin out pugnaciously. Teri eyed him in mild surprise.

"If you think we've spent enough," she said mildly, "you've only to say so, dear. There's no need to be sarcastic."

Feric left Terion as quickly as he could and hurried to their spartan quarters.

If I were a cheap, tight-fisted jerk she'd be a great deal safer right now, he thought, miserably, regretting that he lacked such a nature and ignoring the certainty that Teri would not have anything to do with him if he did. Who could have guessed that a little gilt on her armor would make a difference?

You could read by the light in their eyes if you even mentioned gold to most mercenaries alone showed it to them. The flash of it on Terion's black armor would bring them running like bees to a honeypot. Large, brawny, aggressive, homicidal bees with things that were sharp, pointed, or heavy-some of them sharp, pointed and heavy.

She'd never even think of coming to me and asking, "Sweetheart, would you mind very much if I joined this suicide mission?" So how could she imagine he'd knowingly approve of her making a target of herself for the slings and arrows and knives and spears and swords of

outraged fortune hunters? Well, I won't have it! he thought.

He dragged his two books of magic out from under the bed and unlocked one with a key kept around his neck. When he opened the cover the hair on his arms rose from the outflow power and he shivered slightly.

Feric had been a mere hedge-wizard until Terion stomped into his life and gifted him with these books. With the books for guidance, Feric had discovered that he'd a great deal more power than he'd ever imagined.

His problem was control. Terion had likened Feric's magicking to "using a ten pound battle-hammer to open a soft-boiled egg." After two or three near disasters they'd both agreed he needed a tutor and to put the books away until they found one. Then he'd given his goat to a neighbor and had followed Terion out of his little village into the wide world.

So he shouldn't be doing this. In fact he felt guilty just looking at the books.

But I'm only looking for something small, he rationalized. A little protection spell to off her attractive armor. What could possibly go wrong with that? She'd never know. Besides, it was his agreement that had put her in danger. He was obliged to find a way to protect her. Anyway, he'd no intention of living without her if he'd any say in the matter.

Gritting his teeth, Feric immersed himself in the book's contents.

"Ah-ha!" he exclaimed some time later. "To Render an Object Apparently Invisible."

Thyf spell, he read, causeth the eye to flee the object enchanted, deflecting the gaze as a shield deflectf a blow.

Indeed, if it be well cast, thine enemyf entire bodie shall be turned aside.

"Excellent! Just what I was looking for."

The difficult part would lie in getting Teri to leave her beloved breastplate with him to be enchanted.

Two days later, well before dawn on the day of battle, unit commanders, Terion among them for the first time, met for a final briefing with the Prince and his senior staff.

His Highness's brow was clouded this morning. He stood alone, brooding, wrapped in a black cloak.

He probably thinks he looks romantic, Terion thought, not without sympathy, but what he really resembles is a big-footed puppy someone left out in the rain. Which was, perhaps, to be expected from a boy of seventeen forced to face his own uncle in battle. Occasionally he looked sulky, as the mercenary officers around him yawned, stretched, drank hot things out of mugs or picked at their teeth with daggerpoints. It was hard to look romantic next to someone finishing a piece of toast and brushing crumbs off their gorget.

The Duke had protested the Princes' right to the throne and had given his young nephew a scant month to surrender his birthright. Then he'd marched immediately upon the royal city of Feval to wrest that concession from the Prince by force. Help was on its way from all quarters, but for now the Duke's army outnumbered them considerably.

A great map hung from the wall slightly to the left of the sulking Prince; the Lady General Ples rose from her place and went to it. With a pointer she began to outline the enemy's positions and their own.

As she described the intended course of the battle to come, Terion leaned towards Bruneia.

"Look at that hill anchoring the end of the Prince's line," she whispered. "They've got nothing on it but a few troops! If the Duke gets an inkling of that he'll be over that hill and through our flank like lightning."

"Lady, have pity on the poor sod who gets that position," Bruneia muttered back. "They're already dead, whoever they are."

"Terion of Captain Tesser's company, you'll be here," the General's pointer slapped the map where they'd just been discussing. "I don't need to tell you," Ples said grimly, catching Terion's eye. "How important this position is. At all costs, we are relying on you to hold this hill."

Terion could feel the hair on the back of her neck rise. She knew the eyes of her comrades were on her, so she refused to swallow the lump in her throat until the General had caught her attention again. Then it felt like she was trying to swallow a live cat.

At the conclusion of the briefing the commanders began to file out to muster their troops in the city square. Suddenly, the General was at Terion's side, placing a hand on her arm to stop her. Ples nodded to Bruneia, urging her to leave them alone.

"I wanted to emphasize once again the importance of your position," the General said softly. "I doubt you'll see much action way down at the end of the line, but it's still crucial. Though I'll give you something easy for your first command." Ples smiled at her and squeezed Terion's arm. "Good luck. Carry on," she said and saluted.

Terion returned the salute smartly and walked away. Glancing over her shoulder, she saw Bruneia cover a smile with her gloved hand. No, she was more than smiling, she was laughing.

What does the Captain think of this easy command? Ten wondered. She glanced around and saw her commander in deep and apparently angry conversation with some of the regular army captains.

Suspicion and dismay roiled within her. Did the General think she was stupid? Well, obviously, or she wouldn't have all but suggested that I pack a picnic lunch and something to read.

But her inexperience at command didn't alter the fact that she was going to be seriously undermanned in a vulnerable position. And the General seemed to find it amusing. Teri frowned.

If she were still a sergeant she would've told her commander that the situation stank and why she thought so. But as a commander herself...

She didn't want to look hysterical, nor like she was afraid of a hard post. I wish the Prince would stop brooding and start leading, she thought. She watched General Ples step between Captain Tesser and the Prince. Ples nodded wisely while the Captain expostulated. Not surprising, Teri thought reassured by her commander's obvious anger. This plan looks more like a model for How to Lose a Major Battle in One Easy Step. Frowning, she went to meet the troops.

In the city's main square the pre-dawn silence was shattered by the clatter of horse's hooves on cobblestones, the rattle of armor and the barking of dogs and frustrated sergeants trying to get sleepy troopers properly lined up. The scent of animal dung and of sweat, horse and human, added sharpness to the crystalline chill of the morning air.

"Where's Feric?" Brunea asked, tying off her silver shot braid with a thong.

"He's at home," Terion said, her voice clipped, her face pale. "Asleep."

Brunea raised her brows at that.

The whole city was here to cheer the Prince's forces off to battle. And this was Terion's first command. She'd have sworn the scrawny little newt would understand how important this was to Teri. Even if he didn't, this was war, he might not see her again, or not in one piece anyway.

She shrugged her muscled shoulders. Men were hard to figure. Wizards, downright impossible.

Terion stood on the crest of the hill and stared out over the enemy lines. Her heart sank. Duke's men were lined up awfully deep here and were backed by a rank of cavalry.

Suddenly I feel like the subject of a tragic ballad, she thought. One of those set to an unfortunately bouncy tune. They slew her then with sword and spear, oh, tra la la and hack-away, aye!

The air was laden with the scent of crushed grass, horses and massed humanity. The tension was almost palpable, as though you could tear chunks of it out of the air.

She looked down at the enemy and pictured them charging the hill's gentle slope. They'll barely work up a sweat running up here, she thought.

The Duke's men were laid out in a gentle arc that half surrounded her position. And they were archers. But I have no cover. She flinched inwardly. Ten's eyes flicked left and right as she tried to second guess the enemy commander. She gave that up with a disgusted sound. Just to see them is to know their plan. They're going to walk up here and use our noses to plow up the grass.

Her sergeant came and stood just behind her, his hairy face calm, hazel eyes worried.

It's as if they knew this was our weakest spot, she mused, then clicked her tongue impatiently. Irrelevant at this point, she thought.

Terion wondered if the Prince was aware of this unexpectedly heavy concentration of enemy troops. He might not have noticed how things stood way down here at the end of the line. He certainly seemed to be too busy brooding to be paying attention at the briefing.

So the kid's not a genius. At least he's good hearted. His uncle's head is nothing more than a knot of muscle at the top of his spine and he's as vicious as a drunken wolverine.

And there was something to be said about fighting on the side of the light. But at the moment, staring at the thick shouldered mass of her enemies, she couldn't remember what.

"Sergeant," she said, "send my respects to his Highness. Tell him the Duke has enough men here to push us back at the first go 'round. Tell him they have archers and they're backed by cavalry."

"Yessir," the sergeant said. He turned and called out a name, spoke briefly and sent a long-legged girl running for the center of the line.

A herald bearing a silken banner with the Duke's device came forth from the enemy line.

and approached the Prince's position. He read a long and, no doubt, eloquent speech that Terion couldn't hear, but which almost certainly demanded the Prince's surrender.

She heard his Highness's ringing response of "Never!" from her hilltop, though. And all the Prince's troops called out "Never!" after him in a roar that rolled after the retreating her like thunder.

All the feeling in her body seemed to coalesce in her stomach, making her breath come short. Now, in a moment, the battle would begin. She lowered her visor and breathed a prayer to the Lady.

No word had come from the Prince, not even her messenger had returned. She decided to send another. Things would be no worse here for the loss of two soldiers, and it might just help. She reminded herself that her status as a commander entitled her to the Prince's attention.

She'd known at this morning's briefing that she was in trouble. The General's insistence that she and her troops "stand" had been her first inkling. Experience had taught her that rhetoric like that meant "so long, sucker."

Terion needed archers here and she had pikemen, and not nearly enough of them. She rubbed her gauntleted hands together and tried to think of some new way to deploy her troops that would lessen the enemy's advantage in numbers.

Fine, cold sweat misted over her body, and a shiver ratcheted up her spine, making her gasp. Someone stepping on your grave her mother had said, or maybe that was Feric.

Thinking of Feric got her dander up, which was just what she needed right now. She welcomed the spurt of anger. He'd been asleep when she'd gotten home last night and she had been able to wake him this morning.

Who does he think he is? she demanded of herself. How dare he ignore me at a time like this!

She wondered, and worried, on a deeper level about just what he'd been doing to make her so tired. Jealousy popped its head up briefly, wondered what it was doing here and vanished without really making an impression. Nah. Whatever he's up to it doesn't involve another woman.

The enemy troops began to march, massed spear points glittering in the sun like the surface of a wind ruffled pond. There was a tremendous clanking of armor and the sound of a ringing battle hymn as they moved inexorably forward, picking up speed as they came.

She watched the archers take stance and draw their bows.

"We're going to charge," Terion suddenly said to her second. "On my signal."

"What?" he roared.

"If we stand," she said, "they'll shoot us to shit and then ride right through the gaps. If we charge it might break their line in confusion. Our third option of course, is to simply desert. If we do, the archers will still skewer us and whoever wins here, the Captain will hunt us down and execute us for cowardice. So I'd say charging is really our only course. If that's all right with you, sergeant."

"Yessir," he said, eyes round.

Terion waited until the advancing troops were halfway up the gentle slope of the hill before she gave the signal and charged screaming down upon them at the front of her pikemen.

She waved her sword over her head and tried to keep her balance as she ran on the slippery grass. Now she was committed to action she needed to neither feel nor think beyond the kill of the foe.

The Duke's men stumbled to a confused halt and started to brace for the impact of Terion's troops.

But as the black-clad virago leading them came closer, they saw in horror that she had no body. Legs pumped furiously as she rushed towards them, her unadorned helmet glinted in the morning sun and gauntleted hands brandished sword and dagger, but there was no body.

The more they stared, the greater the compulsion they felt to look away. Terrified, they found their bodies forced to follow their eyes' example. Then, as one, they spun 'round and fled shrieking.

The cavalry horses, already alarmed by the rout, suddenly rolled their eyes in terror as Terion came near. They took the bit between their teeth and fled the field squealing, their riders needless, but frantically, trying to whip greater speed from them.

Terion stopped flat-footed and lifted her visor as the last of the enemy turned tail. She and the sergeant eyed each other, then stared, open-mouthed, after the retreating forces.

"But I bathed just last Lugsday," the sergeant muttered.

Then-all in a moment-everything was clear to her. Terion stood torn between a scream of rage and a sigh of resignation. She whirled her sword through a complicated arc, then furiously paced back and forth, wondering what to do.

She turned to her sergeant.

"Get the troops back into position and hold this hill. I'll be back. Probably."

Then she charged towards the Duke's lines where they'd already engaged with the Prince.

Wherever she went chaos reigned, the heat of battle cooled in cowardly rout, and the Prince's men poured in joyous pursuit of the enemy. In two hours the battle was over, the Duke defeated and kneeling in humiliation before the Prince.

"FERIC!"

Startled from a sound sleep he sat up with a gasp. At the horrific sight of a bodiless warrior charging towards him he scrambled backward. Trying to get out of bed he tangled himself in the bedclothes, falling to the floor with a crash.

"Ow," he groaned.

Terion tore off her helmet and threw it on the bed.

"How dare you?" she bellowed. "What were you thinking of? Are you trying to get me hanged?"

All she could see of him from where she stood was the top of his curly head and his terrified eyes.

"Well?" she screamed.

Fighting down his fear, Feric stammered, "P-p-please c-c-calm d-down. Or, or I-I'll have to r-r-run away."

She turned her back with a snarl and stomped over to the window. Taking a few deep breaths of fresh air, Terion deliberately squashed her anger. Then, desperately calm, she turned to confront him.

"What did you do to me?" she asked quietly.

"Nothing," he said.

Her eyes blazed and he flinched.

Terion calmed herself once more with a heroic effort and said, calmly, "I'm not stupid, you know. You did something!"

"Yes," he admitted, with a sheepish smile, his eyes frantic. "But not to you directly. I, uh, enchanted your new armor."

"Oh! We-el." She threw up her hands as though all she'd needed was an explanation. "Of course! That's just fine. Yes, lovely. And do you happen to know the penalty for using magic swords or armor in battle?" she asked sweetly.

"No," he said in a tiny voice.

"Death!" she hissed. She glared at him and then turned her back. "If you had left well enough alone I'd still be dead, but at least I'd have my self-respect."

That wouldn't matter if you were dead, he thought, but, wisely, did not say.

"No one needs to know," he said. "I can remove the enchantment."

She threw him a look. "Well, that's not exactly honorable either. Now is it?"

Feric stood up and walked over to face her.

"Terion," he said firmly, taking her hands in his. She made to pull them away but he held them with surprising strength. "I love you. And I don't want you to die. Not for money, not so someone can steal your armor, not for honor. I've waited for you too long, I've had you for a little time and I need you too much to watch you put your life at risk and do nothing about it."

"I'm a soldier," she said defensively. But she was cooling down, fighting a smile in fact. "Risking my life is what I do."

Feric's lips thinned to a grim line and he nodded sullenly.

Terion yanked him into a sudden embrace and he made an "Unh!" sound as she pressed her head to her unyielding armor. Putting her hands on his shoulders she gently pushed him to arm's length.

"Now," she said. "What did you do?"

"I found a spell that was designed to give objects the effect of being invisible. The idea is that your eyes just slide away from an object, it can still be seen, but you can't look at it, so it has the effect of being invisible. D'you see?"

She nodded.

"I adjusted it so that you and those you're friendly to could see your breastplate, but you

enemies couldn't," he finished proudly.

"Feric," she said, "the enemy ran away from me. All of them. This was a little more than being able to see me, I was an object of terror. Wherever I went, they fled in panic."

"Oh." His face flushed puce with embarrassment. "I suppose... I must have put... too much emphasis into the spell. Like last time," he mumbled.

"Like when you meant to create a puff of smoke and you made your cottage explode?"

He sighed, "Yes. Too much emphasis."

"We've got to get you a teacher," she said. "You're dangerous."

Some hours later Terion found herself facing the Lady General. She stood to attention and fixed her gaze on a spot just over Ples's head. Still, she was quite aware of the dagger-like stare being directed at her.

"I find myself in a most peculiar situation with you, Lieutenant." Ples pronounced the rank with utter scorn. "On the one hand you're a hero, having won the battle virtually single-handedly. On the other, you obviously broke the law to do it. You see my position." She held her hands palms up as though weighing something in each. "The Prince wants to see you rewarded, the law demands your death. Reward, death, reward," she sighed. "And then I saw the solution. I'll give you your life, but you must leave the city tonight. Also, you must leave that breastplate behind." Ples smiled slyly and rubbed her palms together. "I'm assuming that therein lies the enchantment. You've always been known as a good soldier, but never as a terrifying one. I mean, people have never wet their drawers at the sight of you before. Now have they? Hmm?" Her affable smile turned into a smoldering glare. "So take it off and get out."

Terion blinked. Her armor? One hand went protectively to her chest. This was unexpected, but she supposed it shouldn't be.

"What of my pay?" Teri asked.

"Your pay is your life."

Terion began to remove her breastplate.

"It was very expensive," she said regretfully.

"I'm sure it was. Let that be a lesson to you."

"I didn't know it was enchanted," Terion muttered, lifting the armor over her head. "It was from a reputable shop."

"A likely story," Ples said in disgust, "with your lover being a wizard. If I cared to spend the gelt, we'd hire a full-fledged mage to sniff out the enchanter." She gazed steadily at Terion. "I think we both know where the trail would lead." Ples pursed her lips and looked down at a report for a moment. "I doubt you'd want to," she said, raising her eyes again, "but if I hear you boasting of this escapade I'll have you hunted down and dragged back here to be hanged. That understood?"

"Yes." Teri laid the armor on her desk and stroked the glossy surface, reluctant to part with it.

"Go!" the General snarled.

Terion turned without saluting and walked quickly away. This was bad. The breastplate taken most of their savings, making the loss of her pay a serious handicap. She barked a small little laugh. I can't even sell my dress armor, since the General has it.

Terion turned to spit in the direction of the Lady General's tent and to her surprise saw Ples rush out, dragging two, obviously heavy, saddle bags. And the General was wearing Terion's armor!

Flinging the bags over the back of a very flash horse,

Ples mounted. Then, with a laden pack horse in tow, she galloped off to be swallowed in the darkness.

Teri closed her mouth slowly as, for the first time, she noticed the absence of guards around the General's tent. Now why, she asked herself, would such a trusted member of the Prince's inner circle feel the need to do a midnight flit?

Without thinking, Teri loosed one of the horses picketed nearby and hoisted herself onto its bare back. Then she galloped in pursuit of the runaway general.

As she neared the camp's perimeter she slowed, but Ples charged onward into the darkness.

"Who goes there?" a startled voice demanded.

"Your worst nightmare!" the General bellowed. "Run awaaayyy!"

There was the thwuk! of a crossbow bolt being released, an "Unh!" and the distinctive sound of an armored body hitting the dirt.

Terion could have sworn that she heard a strangled and rather plaintive, "But... ?" from a fallen form. Slowly, she grinned and then, just as Ples had before sending her out to die, Terion began to laugh.

Terion and Feric were plodding down the wide and dusty high-road when the sound of hoofbeats and a familiar voice made them pause and turn.

Brunea pulled up gasping.

"I've been yelling at you forever," she declared.

"What's the matter?" Teri asked warily.

"I've got your pay," Brunea said and tossed it over.

Terion caught the little sack in surprise, pleased by its comforting weight.

"But the General said I wasn't to be paid!"

"She gave no such orders," Brunea said, grinning. "Too busy trying to save her backside to suppose."

"Why?" Feric asked, puzzled. "Did the Duke's army rally and try to rescue him?"

"Ha! Lady bless you, lad." Brunea leaned over and pinched Feric's cheek.

Briefly he considered trying to turn her into a rabbit. But a mental image of himself trying to deal with a Brunea-sized rabbit discouraged him.

"The Lady General," Brunea sneered, "tried to slip through the lines last night. When the watch challenged her-she just charged 'em. Naturally they killed the fool. Oh! Were those worried lads!"

"I know," Teri said smugly, "I saw."

Brunea raised her brows.

"You didn't tell me," Feric said indignantly. "Why was the Lady General running away?"

"She was running from the Princes men," Teri said. "I believe she was selling our battle plans to the Duke."

"And the Duke, like the traitor he is," Brunea paused to spit, "was happy to name her a s. So she was to die anyway. Not so soon a'course," Brunea said regretfully. "Ples had your armor on, the gretch, so I filched it back for you." She slapped a meaty hand against a flattish package tied behind her. "It's got a hole in it, but I'm thinkin' maybe your wizardling can fix that." She stuck her tongue in her cheek, then said off-handedly, "So long as he doesn't put the enchantment back on."

Teri and Feric glanced at each other, then looked at Brunea, their faces carefully bland.

"Well," Teri said, "I'm just glad to be paid."

"Yes," Feric agreed. "Money, always useful."

"There's work up north," Brunea said. "Mind if I travel with you?"

"You're welcome to join us," Teri said. "But we're looking for a wizard willing to teach Feric."

"What wizard is going to take on an apprentice his age?" Brunea demanded scornfully.

"We'll know when we find one," Terion told her and rode placidly on.