

# TO REBUILD THE EYRIE

by

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Eirran shook her hands until the blood began working back through them. She rubbed her mouth; it felt as if it had been stretched out of shape from the gag the man had stuffed in it. The man had knotted the rope into a hobble, tied her feet, and tethered her to a tree as if she were an animal. Well, at least the blindfold was off. She squinted until the light no longer hurt her eyes. She wanted to get a good look at her captor.

"You!" she said, sounding more surprised than she felt. It was just as she had surmised; after all, she had spent the entire day pressed against his body. He was the young man from last night at the tavern. The good-looking one.

"Silence, woman," he said.

"What? You bind and gag me while I'm sleeping, take me who knows where, finally let me down off that splay-footed, awkward gaited nag of yours and then bid me keep silence? I'll show you what kind of silence I'll keep!" She clenched her fists at her sides and began to scream. The man merely glanced at her and paid no attention to her outcries.

"You can scream until you lose your voice," he said calmly. "Nobody will hear you."

Eirran stopped screaming; she had begun to hiccup.

"Damn you," she muttered. "*Hic!*" They were hard hiccups, deep and painful, but not hurting as much as the discomfort of the day's ride. The man had set her in front of him in the saddle, holding her without regard to how she fared or where she was bruised. The cast-off shift she used as nightgown was nearly torn off her by now. She had heard and felt him ripping pieces away as they rode, and panic threatened to overcome her. The brambles had caught at her flesh, and her legs were scratched and bloody. "They'll come looking for—*hic!*—me, you know."

The man shrugged. Now that she had a chance to look at him in the day's fading light, she could see that he was young, with brown hair and eyes that gave off golden glints when seen at certain angles. Why would such a one be moved to kidnap a tavern-keeper's niece?

"Let them look," the man said. He gave a shrill whistle and a bird came swooping down from the clouds to settle on his wrist. It was black, marked with a deep V on its breast. Jesses hung from its feet. She could swear that the man and the bird spoke to each other, making *eek-ik-eek* noises back and forth. Once more the bird lifted itself into the air. It soared, riding the air currents above the small valley the man had chosen for their evening camp. "My feathered brother will give me ample warning if anyone should be able to decipher the false trails I've left this day."

Eirran shuddered and hiccupped again. A Falconer! It could be no other. But why? How? A dozen questions crowded into her mouth, but the only one that made it past her teeth was perhaps the least important and certainly the least likely to be answered. "What is your name?"

He turned and looked at her, and the golden flecks in his eyes flashed in the late-day sun. "That is no concern of yours, woman. I've let you rest. You have room enough to move around. Get busy now. Make a fire. Prepare a meal."

Her temper flared again. "Make your own fire if you want one, and your own meal, too! I'm not doing anything

for you, not until I find out who you are, and what you intend to do with me!"

He shrugged again. "As you wish," he said, and went to tend to his horse. It was a rough-coated beast, not beautiful to look upon, but it didn't seem particularly wearied by the double burden it had carried that day. It had to be one of the fabled Torgian breed. The Falconer took off the saddle pad and the leather bags, rubbed down the horse, and turned it loose to find forage. There was plenty of high grass nearby, and presently Eirran heard the animal munching contentedly. The sound reminded her she had neither eaten nor drunk since the previous night.

"I'm your prisoner," she said, trying to appear more calm, not anger him in turn. "Your—*hic!*—captive. I don't have any obligation to take care of you. Don't you even know that much?"

He stared at her. "You're my woman—a woman," he corrected himself. "If you don't work, you don't eat. But you can have some water." He tossed a half-full skin toward her and she nearly dropped it. Her hands still weren't working properly.

"Thank you," she said. She drank greedily, and her hiccups ceased. She put the stopper back in the neck of the skin and watched while he made camp.

He took something out of the bag, wrapped in a cloth whose weave she recognized. It was the end of the hind-quarter of mutton she had put away in the kitchen the previous night. He gnawed at the bone, tearing off strips of meat with strong white teeth. She turned away, appetite suddenly gone. She heard him opening the bag again, closing it. He got to his feet and came toward her.

The moment she had been dreading arrived. She knew little about Falconers, just the stories men told in her uncle's public house on the road between Kars and Ver-laine, and then they were seldom the main part of the tales. Falconers were supposed to be woman-haters, but she

could think of no other reason for any man to steal a woman from her bed in the night save one. The one her uncle had recently begun to urge her to. For money. Money that she wouldn't be allowed to keep. She stared at the Falconer across the flickering fire.

"No matter how you covered your trail, they'll still come looking for me," she said. She rubbed her hands. They were only a little less swollen, and her mother's ring cut cruelly into her finger. She was surprised she still had it.

"They won't find us." He stared up at the sky at a dot that grew larger as the falcon came down at last and perched on a nearby limb. "They haven't discovered the trail I left for them yet. By tomorrow night we'll be beyond tracking."

"Where are you taking me?" Anything to distract him, to keep him talking.

He looked at her. She was struck by the expression of dislike that was plain on his face. "No reason to hide it, I suppose. We're going into the mountains. You're the first. When I'm finished, there'll be a new Eyrie, a new women's village."

Cautiously, lest she dry up his words, she probed further. "But—but I thought the Falconer way of life was no more."

He scowled. "So everyone thinks. The Old Ones, the enemies. But I have decided to bring it back."

"With me."

"Yes. I—I watched you, last night at the tavern."

She had done her share of looking at him as well, at the young man sitting in the shadows, his hood drawn up, and only an occasional gleam of fire or lamp showing his attractive features, and took pleasure in the fact that she was being observed. She hadn't had any idea he was a Falconer. "Yes," she said. "I saw you looking."

"I heard your name," he continued as if she hadn't spoken, "and then I knew. Eirran. It sounded so—so—"

She almost jumped, startled. Eirran, Eyrie. The sounds were close. "And for that—" she said incredulously, "for *that* you stole me away? For a *name*?"

"It was a sign. You're a woman and the truth is not in you, but you'll do for a start. And later, when my brothers in flesh come and see, they'll bring women also. We'll keep them in the village, just like in the old days. The Falconers will flourish once more!"

"Never!" she exclaimed.

The spell broke. If he had once been considering forcing himself on her, that thought was gone now. He turned and stared coldly at her, the amber flecks in his eyes catching sparks from the firelight. Then he got up and rummaged in the saddlebags once more, coming back to where she sat. He flung some garments at her; if she hadn't put up her arms they would have hit her across the face. "Put these on," he said curtly.

She examined the clothing—it was man's gear, trows and tunic. It was wrinkled and smelled of the saddlebag, but the clothing was clean enough. Probably some of his spare garments; she recognized none of them as having been stolen from the tavern. She looked up at him and let her lip curl with disgust. "And how do you suggest I get into these—these things?" She indicated the rope hobble on her ankles. The intricate knots were beyond her ability to untie with her swollen hands. She could barely flex her fingers, and there were deep marks scored on her wrists.

For the first time, he appeared flustered, not entirely in command. "I don't want to untie you—"

"You'll have to, if I'm to dress myself in other than these rags." She brushed at her tattered nightgown. A bare thigh gleamed in the firelight. She knew now that he had ripped bits of cloth from the garment during the day's journey to use while he was laying the false trail. "Don't worry, I won't run away." She wriggled her toes. "You didn't think to bring my shoes, and I warrant you've no second pair of

boots. Anyway, I'm more afraid of what's out there—" she indicated the darkness outside the circle of their fire "—than I am of *you*." She put all the scorn and derision she felt at that moment into the word.

Stung, he glared at her. But he untied the rope and coiled it away. "You'll learn better," he muttered.

"Ha!" She tossed her head. "Now, where's my blanket? Or am I to cover myself with branches?"

He threw a blanket at her even more forcefully than he had the clothing. "Here!" he said. "Do as you please! I'm beginning to be sorry I ever brought you with me!"

She took the blanket and headed for the shelter of a bush. Presently she returned, clad in his spare garments. They were too big for her, but anything was better than the ruined shift. He had banked the coals of their fire and was asleep or pretending to be, wrapped in his cloak. She neither knew nor cared. She put the blanket on the opposite side of the little fire pit. Worn out by the day's events, she quickly fell asleep.

Next morning, he started to bury her cast-off shift, but she stopped him in time. "We need the cloth," she said, "since you didn't allow me the luxury of throwing a few things into a sack to bring with me."

She tore away part of the shift and wrapped pieces of the thin fabric around her feet. "I don't suppose you've got any thongs or thin cords, do you," she said as she worked. "Only ropes."

But he surprised her by producing a set of leather ribbons, red-dyed. She recognized them as more elaborate versions of those the bird bore. He whistled the falcon to him, and changed the jesses with a surprisingly gentle touch. "Newhold can wear his good one," he said, and handed her the old set.

Her mother used to touch her like that. Her mother— Quickly, she tied the cloth wraps in place and stood up.

"We could have breakfast from those berries over there," she said, indicating a bush just outside the circle of their camp.

He frowned. "What makes you think they're not poisonous?"

"Other birds, smaller ones. They've been at the berries and they won't bother harmful ones," she said patiently. "They're not there now, of course, lest your falcon make his own breakfast from one of them."

"Eat, if you wish," he said, and shrugged. She realized he was refusing to admit a morning hunger, out of pride, or disdain. Yet he had rested the night before, and eaten too.

She made a pocket of the hem of her tunic, filling it with more berries than she could eat, and brought them back to where he was burying the last traces of the fire pit.

"Here," she said. Almost as if he had no interest in the food, he reached out a hand and sampled one.

"Good enough," he said indifferently. "Tart." But he ate his full share before they were all gone.

That day's journey was somewhat easier on Eirran. She still rode in front of him and he kept one arm firmly around her waist, but she was neither bound nor gagged. And she could keep the forked horn on which the bird usually rode from digging into her flesh with every step. The bird shunned it now.

Because she could see where they were going, she could move with the rough-coated Torgian rather than be jounced about like a sack of grain. She glanced at the sun's position. North. They were headed north and east, in the direction the ruined Eyrie of the Falconers was rumored to lie. Mountain peaks were already growing around them, high and broken as they had been when the Old Ones in Estcarp had shattered the land in the Great War.

She looked back at her companion, curious as to what sort of man he was under his Falconer's guise. He bore a dart-gun at his waist and had a half-filled bandolier slung

over his shoulder. He carried no sword, only a long hunting-dagger strapped to his thigh. There was a bundle behind him, covered with oiled cloth. She guessed by the size of it that it held bird helm and mail shirt. The falcon scorned to ride near her. It appeared to consider itself deprived of its perch, alternately soaring overhead and riding on the man's shoulder. She couldn't tell whether it was war-trained or not.

Around mid-morning, she began to grow bored with the countryside and the fruitless speculation about her captor. "If we're to rebuild the Eyrie, don't you think it might be nice to get acquainted?"

"Why?"

"Oh, I don't know. It would pass the time. And I'm no Falconer woman—not yet, anyway. I like to know things."

Her apparent acceptance of her fate seemed to soften him a trifle. He shifted his arm around her waist, settling her more comfortably against him. "What sort of things would you know?"

"Oh, how you came to be at my uncle's tavern last night, what you used to do before you decided to rebuild the Eyrie." She paused, cautious. "How to please you best. You know."

Hesitantly, he began to speak. At first they talked of inconsequential things. But she began to pick up hints about his background. She had always known that a man talked most eagerly about himself, and this Falconer was, after all, a man.

He was young, not much past twenty, a year or two older than herself. He had until lately served as a marine guard in one of the few Sulcar ships that still plied the waters to the west. But even more than with other Falconers who followed the same path, he cared not for the sea. He became ill from the motion of a ship even when it lay at anchor. And so he had left that service, determined to seek another as a mercenary, a blank shield. He had come to the



tavern, seen Eirran and heard her name, and this new plan sprang into his mind full-formed, like a waking dream.

Eirran thought about this a while. She could understand dreams; she had had many of her own. The most persistent had her in a cottage with two gardens outside, one for food, a smaller for flowers. Within, all was immaculate and tidy; she sat at the table concocting some herbal mixture while a kettle sang on the hob, a cat purred on the hearth, a baby lay gurgling happily in the cradle.

Well, old Juvva was teaching—had been teaching her herblore. Cats and kettles were easily come by, but to get a baby and do it the right way she would have to marry one of the dullwits who came to the tavern. As Eirran grew and her shape became more attractive to men, they began slipping her an occasional coin in appreciation of a smile, a bit of extra service, or the infrequent glimpse down her bodice when she bent over to put the flagons on the table. She saved these coins the tavern's patrons handed her with a single-minded fierceness. Someday, she would have enough to purchase her own cottage. Like Juvva, she would brew potions and remedies, earning her way, and there live alone, beholden to no man, a tribe she had learned to dislike.

She knew her uncle suspected she had this store of coin, though she kept it well hidden behind a loose board in the loft. At night it was under her pillow when she slept. She dimly remembered the sound of the pouch falling to the floor when the Falconer had taken her. She wondered if her uncle had stopped after finding it and not bothered to search for her.

Their camp that night was easier than it had been the day before. She watched him with interest. His motions were economical, graceful. He dug a small fire pit, ringing it with stones, and kindled a flame. He fed it with small twigs until it was well caught, then added larger bits of wood. She noted that the fire made little smoke.

When the bed of coals suited him, he put a small kettle into the pit and poured some water into it. He opened the parcel of provisions, setting aside the mutton-bone for another time, and took out a lump of smoked meat instead. He prepared to slice it into the water.

"No, no," she said, coming close. "That's not the way. That meat has to be fried first. Slice it into a pan, and save the grease to flavor some trail-biscuit." She squatted on her heels beside him.

"Here, you do it," the man said. He got out a shallow pan and lined it with slices of meat. He didn't trust her with the knife, but he did trim a forked stick for her so she could spear the bits of meat and turn them. As they browned, she began dropping them into the pot.

"I don't suppose you thought to steal some vegetables," she said.

"Yes, I did." He opened another parcel and produced some carrots and a few leeks.

"Chop them," she ordered, "and then go look around and see if you can find anything else for the pot. Wild turnips, garlic, edible roots. I've seen a lot growing around here as we rode. And give me that packet of flour and something to stir with."

"I don't know which plants to look for," he said. "I'm a warrior, not a farmer."

Without a word, she turned over the watching of the rest of the frying meat to him while she gathered what she needed. He prepared the roots she'd found and dropped them into the stew while she stirred up the trail-biscuit and set it to cooking on a hot stone. Good smells filled the campsite.

"Men," she said, shaking her head. "You don't know how to do anything."

"I've made out well enough until now."

"I don't see how," she said, and ladled out half the stew for him. He had only a single metal dish and one spoon. He

kept the dish but gave the spoon to her, using the forked stick for himself. He speared the chunks, blowing on them before putting them into his mouth while she ate out of the pot. They put the pan of grease-flavored trail-biscuit between them and used it to soak up the broth. Together they cleaned the pots and utensils with sand. Newhold the falcon and the Torgian had long since fed, each in its own manner, and now slept nearby.

He and Eirran stared at each other across the fire.

"You're a good enough trail companion," he said, "even if you are just a woman."

"And you can probably learn, even if you are just a man." She stared into the flames. "I've no more liking for your ilk than you have of mine, Falconer. But I'll say one thing for you. I haven't had to slap your hands away from me every moment."

The memory of how his arms had brushed across her breasts during the day as he held her while they rode hung in the air between them. But that, she thought, had been accidental, the consequence of the manner in which they traveled.

"Sleep, woman," he said. "Tomorrow we begin to climb in earnest."

She settled down under the blanket, but sleep didn't come as easily as it had the night before. She found herself wondering about Falconers, and how they had come to have such disdain of women. Her own dislike of the man-tribe was easily understood; she had dodged too many grasping hands and pinching fingers in her time. But what had caused such a rift between Falconer men and women?

Perhaps, she thought, back in the before-time, when the Old Ones ruled in Estcarp and wars were fought by men and not by Power-wielding witches breaking mountains and tossing the land about, there had been a chief of the Falconers whose wife had been a bad woman. Perhaps she

smiled at other men, younger men, stronger, and lied to her husband. And later, when he discovered this, as husbands are bound to do with their wives, or wives with their husbands, perhaps he moved her to a house in a faraway fold of the mountains, where her lovers couldn't visit her without being missed in the warren of caves and cliffs that comprised the mountain fortress that was the Eyrie.

And perhaps, Eirran thought, warming to the story she was spinning for herself, others of the Falconers decided to do the same with their wives, lest they be tempted to follow the same paths the chief's wife had taken. Both sides were proud, unyielding, turning their natural yearnings for each other into disdain and indifference, men for women and women for men. And with the passing of the years, both sides had come to regard the arrangement as the only proper one to have.

But the indifference was merely feigned, Eirran realized. She had long ago learned that that which a man most loudly professes to despise was that which he longed for the greatest. If there had been true indifference between the men and women of the Falconers, their entire tribe would have died out long since.

Somehow, that thought troubled her more than anything else that had happened to her the last two days. Her dreams were uneasy that night.

The next day dawned gray and full of clouds, and Newhold was reluctant to fly in the heavy air. But the Falconer urged the bird aloft anyway.

"Rumors have it that strange beasts live in these mountains, since the Great War," he said. "We must be alert."

When the rain began he spread his cloak over the horse's rump and drew Eirran close against him, sheltering all as best he could against the cold drizzle. The Torgian trudged on, finding it slow going over the mud and stone. And then

Newhold came swooping down from the sky, screaming a warning. The bird was nearly too late; the dark, misshapen beast was on them almost before the Falconer could draw his dart gun. Eirran found herself in the mud as he threw her to one side. She screamed in pain as her shoulder struck a rock.

He cursed and fired, and Eirran's scream was drowned in the roar of outrage from the beast as the darts struck home. Newhold screeched and stooped, utterly fearless in the defense of the Falconer. The horse fought also, rearing and striking out with its hooves, and where they hit, the sound was dark and solid. She heard more snarls and screams, a sound of underbrush being trampled as something crashed through it, and then the Falconer was kneeling beside her where she lay.

"Is—is it dead?" she asked fearfully.

"I don't think so," he said. "But we drove it off, Newhold and Rangin and me. How do you fare?"

"I don't know," she said. With his help, she tried to sit up and she groaned in pain and clutched her shoulder.

"We'll take shelter," the Falconer said. "We've come close to the Karsten gap, the place we once called the Keyhole. Even though the Keyhole is no more and the mountains are shivered and rent, there must still be a cave someplace nearby."

"Maybe it's taken already by that—that monstrosity," she said, and shuddered.

"I'll make certain it's a place with a narrow entrance, where the beast cannot go," he said. "If I help you, can you ride?"

"Yes, I think so."

He put her on Rangin's back, putting his hand on the halter and leading the way slowly through the worsening rain. To her relief, they found a shelter almost at once, a narrow cleft in the broken mountain. She dismounted, but the horse had to be unsaddled before it could squeeze

through the opening. She found comfort in this fact. Newhold was already perched on an outcropping of stone just overhead.

"I've got a lamp somewhere," the Falconer said, "and a flask of oil. We can have a light, even if we can't hope for a fire. But Rangin gives off a lot of heat."

He struck steel to flint, and presently they were able to see the interior of the cave.

The room they were in wasn't a large one, nor was the floor even. It had once been sand-covered, but the upheaval of the Great War had pushed underlying stones through the sand and all but hid it from view. Eirran sat down on one of the larger stones while the Falconer shoved others to one side, hastily making a rough barricade between them and the entrance to the cave.

"When the rain stops, I'll go search for firewood," he said. "In the meantime, let's have a look at your shoulder."

She would have loosed the fastening at the throat of the tunic and pulled the garment down on one side, but he would have none of that. Brusquely, he pulled it off her, over her uninjured arm and down the one that was hurt. She gasped and clutched the garment against her exposed breasts, but he took no notice. Intent on examining her for injuries, he moved the arm this way and that, ignoring her protests. His face cleared.

"Nothing is broken," he said, and she realized he had been worried and concerned over her. He looked at her anew, and frowned. "You're a mess!"

She touched her hair, uncombed for two days and now wet and full of mud. She opened her mouth, a sharp retort springing to her lips, but then he took her in his arms.

"It was my fault," he said. "You are in my care. It's a miracle you weren't killed or seriously injured. But you're alive. We're both still alive." He stroked her face. He was rain-wet, and his hands muddy; he must be leaving smears on her cheeks. "You are beautiful, you know. So very

beautiful." He held her against him for a long moment while her heart raced at the unexpected pleasure of this contact, so different from the way they had pressed together while they rode. Then, she thought dimly, it had been from necessity. But now, the thumping of his own heart, reaching her ear where it was pressed against his chest, told her he held her because he wanted to, because he wanted her—as much, she realized, as she wanted him.

They sank down together onto the sandy floor of the little cave.

Later, he cradled her head on his shoulder. "It was your first time, wasn't it?" he said quietly.

"Yes."

"I didn't dare dream—" He closed his lips on the thought. "It was my first time also."

"Ah." She reached a hand up to stroke his face, and winced. She had forgotten her bruised shoulder. "I—I don't know what to call you."

"We don't give our true names lightly. But you, this, this is different. I'm known as Yareth."

"Yareth," she repeated, liking the sound of it. Then she flung herself against him again, heart leaping, but this time in terror.

Something snuffled and howled outside. She heard the sound of claws against stone, felt the ground shake when the beast tore away a piece of the mountain and let it drop. Newhold bated and screeched, eager to attack. Knowing it would be the bird's doom, Yareth sat up at once, uttering a shrill whistle and holding out his arm for a perch. The falcon reluctantly obeyed. Its talons dug in and drew blood from Yareth's unprotected skin before he could transfer the bird to the saddle-fork and secure the leash. Behind them, Rangin stamped angrily. A misshapen limb ending in a four-clawed thing like a hand, groped into the cavern mouth. The hand encountered a stone, one of the ones Yareth had moved there. The beast grasped the stone,

pulled it outside. There was a yowl of rage and frustration; then the area above the opening shivered, and a shower of rubble tumbled down from where the beast had smashed the stone against the mountain face.

"And you fought that?" Eirran whispered, appalled.

"It didn't expect opposition, and retreated to think things over," he replied, just as softly. He reached over and pinched out the lamp.

"What do we do now?" she said. The darkness pressed in on her and she was grateful when he moved close.

"We wait. If I'm correct, this is a something that likes not the light. If we have been traveling on a sunny day, we would surely have met it while we slept."

She shuddered. Following his example, she groped for her clothing and put it on again. "Will the mountain hold it off?" she said fearfully.

"I don't know. We'll just have to wait and see. But never fear." A movement told her he had his dart gun in one hand and had drawn the hunting-knife with the other. "If it gets in, it won't find us alive. Any of us."

They huddled together, the four of them, all through the rest of the day and night. The man and woman scarcely dared utter a word, though they found as time passed that they knew each other's minds and thoughts better than if they spoke. She began to hiccup again from fear, and automatically he handed her the water-skin. When he whistled softly to the falcon or stroked the Torgian's rough coat and then touched her breast it meant, I would have you in my arms but dare not. And when she touched his face it meant in return, I desire you as well and we will embrace again if only in death. Sometime during the night he handed her the knife and she pressed his hand. I'll do what needs to be done, her touch said, if it comes to that.

Now and then the beast left the cave mouth for a short time. They could only surmise that it went away to feed, for when it returned its onslaughts against the opening



were even fiercer than before. She began to understand that the beast wanted them not so much for food, but because of some hatred it carried in its bones, that only the feel of their flesh under its claws could slake.

Toward morning, they began to strain their eyes, searching for a dawn without clouds, for the sun to return. And little by little, the light came. Eirran thought it was her imagination, but then she could see Yareth's face in the gloom. Outside, the beast uttered a last howl of frustrated rage and shuffled off to find its lair before the sun came up fully.

Yareth got up, shaking the stiffness out of his limbs. "We have to get out of here now, while we can," he said.

"Yes. I'll tend those talon cuts on your arm later."

They gathered their few belongings and ventured out of the cave. Eirran sucked in her breath; the face of the mountain was deeply scored, and slivers of stone lay everywhere, marking the ferocity of the beast's assaults against it. They had to clear a path through the rubble before they dared lead even the sure-footed Torgian through it. Once outside, Yareth saddled Rangin quickly and pulled Eirran up before him. Then he turned the horse's head back in the direction they had come the previous day, and dug his heels into Rangin's belly. The Torgian grew high-rumped with the steepness of the path it found, going down much more quickly than it had come up.

"Aren't we going on, searching for where the Falconers' Eyrie used to be?" she said, startled.

"No. If beasts like that now walk the mountains in the dark, there might be worse ones who go in light," he said. "It's true. The Falconers' way of life, as we knew it, is no more." He shrugged. "Everything ends. Perhaps it's better so."

She turned in his embrace, looking up at him, but he refused to meet her gaze. He stared off into the distance,

frowning. Well then, it couldn't be easy for him, giving up his dream. No more than it was for her, giving up her own as she must now. The cottage, the coins that were now almost enough to pay for it— She sighed.

“What is it?” he said. “Are you in pain?”

“No. I was just thinking. I had a dream too, and a little money I was saving to buy a place of my own. It's gone now.”

This time he turned her in his arms. For the first time, he smiled, and looking at him, she realized she loved him. “Your money is here, in the bottom of one of the saddlebags!” he said. “I brought it with us, so you could use it and buy things to comfort yourself with, later! I almost had to tear your fingers from the pouch when I tied your hands together, you know.”

She began to laugh. She slipped one hand around his neck and pulled his face down to hers while the Torgian carried them to a future full of new dreams neither could have had imagined only a few short hours before. The falcon, Newhold, swooped down and took its accustomed perch on the saddle fork.

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## Afterword

*The curious relationship between Falconers and their women has always intrigued me. Both sides refuse to yield; each side thinks it is correct, the other wrong. When two such proud factions are at odds like this—and particularly when these factions are made up of men, and women—there has to be an attraction even greater than that which normally exists between the sexes. That which is desired*

*must become that which is shunned, or the stability of the entire society is threatened.*

*When the Eyrie was destroyed in the Great War, the Falconer way of life went with it. What if, I thought, there was a young Falconer, too youthful to have actually lived in the Eyrie. He would doubtless have a head full of romantic notions of what it must have been like, never having experienced it first-hand. And what if he met a young woman and decided to try to make his dreams come true? And what if she also had her dreams—which might not coincide with his? And what if this enormous mutual attraction worked between them, despite their differences? What would happen then? Given this premise, "To Build the Eyrie" practically wrote itself. The people came alive for me so much that I want to write another story, about what happened to them later.*

—SASHA MILLER

