

Future Times Past: The Eagles' Tale

written by Rafe Martin ~ illustrated by Anna Rich

Chapter Three: Rainera's Secret Plan

a breakfast serials story

When Dalton said that the Eagles had returned and were on the mountain, pandemonium erupted. Shouts rang out. Mothers grabbed their children. Some people began to sing the old tune "They've Come Again in Our Time."

"Settle down," Rainera's father called above the noise. But no one listened.

Then Phil Brunton, the mayor, stood up. His shoulders were broad, and his face hard as nails. He cupped his hands to his mouth and shouted, "Listen up! Let's handle this in a normal way. Turn up those lights!" As the hall brightened, the villagers began to settle down, though many still murmured uneasily.

"Normal?" a woman exclaimed. "How do you handle a story that becomes real?"

"Calmly," answered the mayor, hearing her. "Steadily. We'll hold off the Telling." He turned to Rainera's father. "That all right, Doc?"

"Sure. If Eagles appear when you're telling their tale," Rainera's father said, "it's a good sign."

"Or a very bad one," a man muttered.

"We're already gathered, so it's a good sign, I say," repeated Rainera's father. "They've returned at the time of the Telling. What could be better?"

"Hear that?" said the mayor. "A good sign, like Doc

says. Now, let's let Watcher Dalton finish. He's no wolf-crier, but a young man we can trust." Still eying the crowd, the mayor nodded to Dalton.

Dalton looked around and cleared his throat. The mayor nodded and said, "Say your piece, son."

The boy licked his lips and began.

"I was on the mountain ridge, maybe half-way up, when I saw a light falling slowly from the sky. I went up higher."

Rainera heard mutterings.

"The light got bigger and brighter," continued Dalton.

"Atta boy! Brave lad!" a man called from the back of the hall. Dalton gave a smile and swallowed. Rainera felt proud of him, speaking like that in front of everyone. She knew how shy he was.

"When I got to the clearing I... saw it; round, silvery, and almost as big as this hall!"

Rainera heard more muttering. It was how the Telling described the Eagles' flying house.

"A door opened. A staircase came down, and an Eagle walked out," he said. "No mistaking. And it was big! Much taller than even

Wilton Green!" All eyes swiveled toward Wilton Green, who was leaning against the wall, towering nearly a head above everyone else.

Bilt let out a gasp. "Giants!" he exclaimed, and hid his face against his mother's side.

Rainera looked at her little brother, and though she was stunned by Dalton's news, she wasn't frightened. She smiled at Bilt, in an adult kind of way she thought, to



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reassure him. But he shook his head angrily. Their mother looked at Rainera, sighed, then comforted Bilt, who stuck out his tongue.

"Let him be a baby," Rainera thought. She wanted to see the mighty Eagles. But according to the records, they always stayed on the mountain, and only chosen elders got to see them.

"It's not fair," she told herself.

But then an idea began to form in her mind.

"Hmmm. Maybe I can get Dalton to show me where they landed. Maybe we could sneak up and see the real Eagle Mother! Wouldn't that be something!"

"And that's it," Dalton said. "I backed away, then ran back down here."

"Well done," the mayor said approvingly. He turned to the crowd. "That seems clear, doesn't it? The Eagles are back, and they're waiting on the mountain. They've returned, in our time."

"My records say they stayed three weeks last visit," said Rainera's father. "The old doc got better bug-killers from them—medicines that stop infection—and they gave him our X-ray machine and the DNA scanner." An agri-technician from the crop domes added, "We got our micro-drip computer then. It increased previous yields two-fold."

"You see? Nothing to fear," put in the mayor.

Someone coughed and muttered, "Except when they hurl lightning and the mountain gets shrouded with clouds. It'd be awful spooky to climb the trail then. I wouldn't go."

Someone commented, "Who'd ever ask you to?"

That got a laugh. Which was good, because the next minute, lightning flashed and thunder crashed. Again, people looked at one another wide-eyed.

A woman said, "I know our records say that Eagles are good. But they're so advanced, powerful, strange,

and... well, alien, it's hard not to get the shakes knowing they're back. It is spooky."

"Spooky or not, they're here," the mayor said. "And all we've got to do now is decide who's going to meet them. So let's just take it one step at a time."

He called out a few names—Rainera's father among them. Then he said, "Everyone else might as well go home. You'll all know soon enough who's been selected."

Rainera stood up and tried to catch up with Dalton, but her mother called, "Rain!"

Seeing her Mother struggling to lift the blankets and pillows they'd brought, Rainera went back to help. She gave Bilt a stern look and, after a scowl in his sister's direction, he pitched in, too.

Trying to catch her husband's eye, Mother signaled with her free hand as her children took the load from her. At last Father looked up and silently mouthed, "Don't worry. I'll be home soon."

Mother sighed anxiously. Then the three of them joined the crowd and left the hall. Rainera looked around—but Dalton was gone.

Outside, the night was dark and cold, especially compared to the brightness and warmth inside the Hall. The sky seemed to have been swept clear of clouds. Stars glittered overhead. With her head tipped back, Rainera searched for the Big Dipper—and gasped. The clouds weren't gone after all! They had just moved. Instead of being scattered across the night sky, they were all oddly gathered in one spot—around the mountaintop, where the mighty Eagles had just landed.

to be continued...

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