

SHE'S THE ONE WHO GETS IN FIGHTS

by S.R. Cronin

EXCERPT

The snow stopped after a couple of hours, leaving us riding through a sunny and bitterly cold afternoon. We were lucky the winds remained scarce. Near the end of our ride, Tamara split us into three groups, each with an officer as its leader. She sent Rooslin to ride with others, but kept me in her troop, and motioned for me to ride beside her.

“Are you sure?” I felt the position belonged to one with more seniority.

“I am.” Then, as an afterthought. “You’re the only person in this group I’ve seen fight. I want you at my side.”

I suppose her remark made me proud, and more determined to do right by her. Otherwise, perhaps I wouldn’t have done what I did.

The sun dipped behind the hills to our southwest by the time we arrived at the village, but the sky would remain light for at least another hour. Tamara stopped us on the outskirts, behind a clump of fir trees near the river’s edge.

“My group will ride in alone and attempt to find out what these people want. Perhaps this can be handled without bloodshed. Always best. The man at the back of my team will blow once on the horn if he wants group two to follow us into town. Sometimes a bigger show of force is all that is needed to move a conversation along.” She turned to the leader of group two. “You. Enter but do not engage unless we are already fighting. If we aren’t, just stand behind us and look fierce. You understand?”

He nodded. She turned to the leader of group three. “And you. Cross the creek after we enter town. It’s not that deep here. Circle behind the village. Two sounds from our horn means attack them from behind with all you’ve got, but be careful not to hurt the villagers. You won’t hear our horn blow twice unless we’re in trouble.”

This, my first exposure to military strategy, fascinated me.

I rode in at Tamara’s side, both scared and proud.