

*The tavern common room was filled with noise, guardsman, and locals. The air held a festive spirit, like a party during a holiday. Smoke, wafting above the heads of the patrons, filled the air with the aroma of smoked meat and fresh bread. Traven pushed his way through the crowd to the bar and took one of the empty seats. The sassy barmaid winked at him and in a sultry voice asked him if he saw anything he liked. She held a hand to her breast and patted the top of its roundness. Traven smiled at her double meaning and ordered a glass of the house special. The party was loud. Traven turned his back to the bar and watched the other occupants of the room. His friend, Jar, was trying to dance with a pretty young serving girl, but Jar's apparent drunkenness made the dance comical. Traven could see that the girl was trying to prop Jar up and maneuver him back into his chair. Jar glanced up, saw Traven, and yelled for him to join them. Traven pushed off the bar and moved in his friend's direction.*

*Suddenly there was a loud knocking on the tavern door.*

*"What in the world?" thought Traven.*

*The knocking came again. The room had become completely quiet. Every eye turned in the direction of the sound. The knocking came once more. Every person in the room looked from the door to him. The room was as silent as a tomb. The knock came a third time.*

*Traven paused, in confusion and then yelled, "Come in."*

*The door swung open and a light shone from the outside into the tavern. Suddenly, a vision of beauty stood in the doorway. She was tall and slender, dressed in all the silks and silver of a high Noble. Her long hair was unbound and seemed to float in soft waves around her face and down her back to her small clinched waist.*

*She moved cautiously in from the doorway. "I'm sorry to intrude, but it is of grave importance that I speak to you, immediately," she nodded her head in his direction.*

*Every eye in the room moved back and forth between Traven and this vision of perfection.*

*"Of course," he said.*

*The other members of the room quickly fled in all directions until Traven and the Lady were the only ones remaining. He clumsily pulled out a chair for her. She moved cautiously forward and took the offered chair. Traven sat down in the chair facing her. Then, remembering his station, quickly stood up again. She motioned with a delicate hand that he should sit down again. He sat. He felt tongue tied. His feet moved nervously under the table.*

*The lady bowed her head and then looked up at him. "I do truly apologize. I did not mean to involve you in this disaster. I cannot think of how to extract you from it now unscathed. Where are they taking you?" she asked gently.*

*Traven grimaced. He didn't want to think about this subject. He had been having a good time. Why couldn't they go back to just having a good time.*

*She sat unmoving waiting for an answer.*

*"They are taking me to Collin Hall. There is a Minder there."*

*"What are you charged with?"*

*"Treason, but I am not really sure why. Something to do with me being the rider of the red warhorse. They are not very clear about what they want from me, except they seem to think I have a message."*

*The beautiful maiden dropped her eyes again, but not before Traven had seen the knowledge that she knew what was going on.*

*“The Minder will use what you are not even aware you know to stop my mission.”*

*Traven frowned in confusion. The ceiling of the tavern lifted and lightened and then darkened as memory of the Royal guard slamming his fist into Traven’s stomach flashed across the sky about them.*

*“I know, and I am sorry. I wish that we had picked a different horse”. A memory of two figures, one the boy and one the lady persuading his large warhorse from his stall flashed across the sky. “I do apologize,” she said again.*

*The misery in her voice wrung Traven’s heart. Traven wanted to reach out, in comfort, and touch the hands she held clasped before her on the rough table top, but he restrained himself.*

*She raised her head and looked at him imploringly, “I need your help. I would say it will be dangerous, but it cannot put you in more danger than you are currently in.” She swallowed hard and squared her shoulders. She spread her hands flat on the table before her. “Unfortunately, I cannot tell you the details. Even my being here is dangerous and not the smartest move on my part. At this point, I have endangered you farther by making you aware of my presence. I have no choice, but to try my best to free you.”*

*Traven jerked in surprise at her words, and glanced around suspiciously. He was dreaming he realized. This whole thing was a dream. His crazy mind trying to make sense out of the missing facts he didn’t know. Well, he congratulated himself. He had made up a marvelous story. He especially liked the beautiful damsel in distress bit. He sat up straighter and looked around*

*the room again. His gaze caught on the movement of the images flashing across the sky. He felt like patting himself on the back. His mother had always remarked on his creative imagination.*

*He looked back at the beautiful Lady who sat across from him.*

*“What exactly do you need me to do?” he asked.*

*The Lady pulled a deep breath in as though bracing herself for the worst. “I need you to take the boy north.” A clear image of the young blonde boy appeared on the sky.*

*Traven laughed. “I’m a little tied up right now,” he chuckled.*

*“If the boy can get you loose, will you promise to take him north?” she asked, her eyes begging his help.*

*Traven shrugged this was all just a dream. Why not? He nodded his head.*

*The Lady’s face lit up with delight and relief. “Oh, thank you,” she jumped up from the chair, “oh, thank you. You cannot imagine how important this is.”*

*Traven watched as she fairly danced out of the tavern. The door closed behind her and disappeared.*

*“Well, shoot,” he thought. He should have required payment of a kiss, before he agreed. Oh, well, he was chivalrous. He shook his head in disgust; he didn’t even accost Noble ladies in his dreams.*