



The Apprentice

The Courage To Seek

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Betrayed

The stillness.

The quiet.

The emptiness.

No words can describe these things when you look at your father for the first time in months, and he is lying in a coffin. It is especially tragic when the last words you ever spoke to him were in anger. Hans tried to catch his breath as he stood there. Hans could not believe that this was happening or that it could be true. He never had a real chance to tell Father how sorry he was for the things he said before he left. Never again could he hear father's gentle voice as they worked beside one another in the little shop he had now come to love.

Hans fell to his knees as his hands clung to the side of the casket, which held his father. He could not breathe. The room was spinning around as he tried to comprehend how this could be true. His heart felt as though it would burst inside him. His thoughts were numb as he knelt beside his father and felt the deepest pain of his life. If he had only known then what he knew now, none of this would have ever happened. His mind tumbled backward to a time seven months ago, which changed his life forever. It was then

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that the journey began, a journey of manhood through his beloved country of Valorem.

Valorem was a peaceful country with gently rolling hills for its farmers, abundant forests for the craftsmen, and ample coastlines for merchants. Life was good for both the country people and those in its great cities. Its king was an honest man who lived at peace with all his neighbors. Under his rule, the country had prospered and grown, and its ports were always full of merchant ships. Few people ever remembered when there had been a war, and no one worried that one would come.

It was a place where the older men would sit and tell stories to the children about the days that had passed. A place where neighbors could count on one another for help and adults rarely left the town where they grew up. People were born and died in the same villages where their ancestors had lived. Each family had a legacy of its ancestors, and the children were taught the value of life.

To the years of prosperity, there seemed to be no end. Each year the merchants made more and more trips to distant ports to sell their goods, and the craftsmen could not keep up with the demand for their wares. Life was truly good in Valorem, and no one could imagine how it could get any better. There was a confidence in the people which seemed to make them invincible to the world, and they all knew that one day Valorem would be the greatest of countries.

On the northern border, there was a small village called Crescere. Being on the edge of the country, it was quiet and far from the excitement of the cities. The only way into town took one

through a covered bridge which spanned a small stream. Everyone knew when someone was coming into their town because they could hear the horse's hoofs on the wooden planks of the bridge. It was tough for a visitor to go to Crescere and not be noticed, which made everyone feel secure. Even so, all were welcome because never was there a more gentle and peaceful village than Crescere.

The central part of town was a mixture of small cottages and shops run by the different craftsmen. On this particular night, the village slept quietly as a soft blanket of snow fell. The homes were small but neatly kept, and each one had a warm fire going. On the far edge of town, nestled in the forest, was the home of Frederick, the furniture maker. His shop was humble, and he and his family lived above it. In warmer times, Frederick would often work out under the shade of the giant pine trees with his only son Hans.

On this morning, Hans awoke long before everyone in his house. Even though it was still dark outside, he had much work to do before his father and mother awoke. He shivered as he made his way to a small desk in the corner of his room. Hans quickly grabbed a blanket from his bed and wrapped it around himself. As the oil lamp flickered to life, he cupped his hands around the small flame to warm them. The room was so cold that he could see his breath as he began to work by the light of his lamp, but it didn't matter to Hans, he was too excited. He was putting the finishing touches on the plans to the new tool-chest that he wanted to build. He had been working on these plans for a month, and it was all he could do to keep them a secret

For the last seven years, Hans' father has been training him as an apprentice. Ever since he was a small boy in his father's

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workshop, Hans had wanted to be a furniture maker. He thought that his father was the greatest woodworker in the world, and he was proud to be his apprentice. Hans' father was the best-known master craftsman in the country. He could have made furniture for kings and nobles, but instead, he worked for the local peasants and farmers. Even though he had many chances to go to the city and open a large shop, Frederick remained in their little village. Hans never did understand why Father did not jump at the chance to go to the city. As soon as his apprenticeship was over, he was going.

The wages in the city were much better, and Hans wanted the chance to make a name for himself. He knew that Father could have had many more opportunities in the city. No one knew more about wood than Father, and the things that he could build were just amazing. Hans would often watch in wonder as his father would shape rough lumber into something of beauty that others had said could not be made. That was why Hans worked so hard on his tool chest plans so that Father would be proud of him.

Their little workshop was just one large room that contained a fireplace and two workbenches. The tools in the shop were old but well cared for, and there were several big windows which let in plenty of light. In the back of the shop was a place which was off-limits to everyone except Father. This room was always locked, and Father never allowed anyone in. Hans assumed that Father kept his records and money in there.

Upstairs, their home was small but neatly decorated. Hans' mother had sewn curtains for the windows on the front of the house and planted flowers in the window boxes. Over the years,

the family had little money to buy wood for their furniture, but Father had slowly saved enough to furnish the house nicely. Hans remembered the year that his father made a new table and benches for his mother. He had kept them in the corner of the shop. When working on it, Father mixed the pieces in with other projects on the workbench. It had taken him all year to get it made, and he managed to keep it hidden from Mother until Christmas. Hans remembered how Mother had cried all morning because she was so happy.

Mother didn't know a lot about furniture making, but she appreciated the beauty of the pieces that Father made. Other craftsmen respected Father for his excellent work. His joints were always exact, and he was meticulous in the fitting. Close enough was never acceptable to him; it had to be precise. Father knew that the people who bought furniture from him could not afford to replace it in a few years. He made his furniture to last for a lifetime. He took the same care with other's furniture that he did with his own. Father took pride in his work, and what made it last were the details that few people ever saw. It was not unusual for Father to throw a piece away when other furniture makers would have just made it fit. Father made furniture for the locals as though the king himself would use it.

This was why it was so crucial for Hans to have every detail of his tool chest drawn out. Father would go over them very carefully and inspect all the details. He would want to see what joints were used and how they fit into the whole project. He would check and recheck all the measurements. The gaps around the drawers would have to be just right so that the drawers would work smoothly in the rainy season and not be sloppy in the summer.

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Hans had to show which way the grain ran on each piece so that it would not bind and crack. He had to indicate what kind of wood and fasteners would be used and how much everything would cost. Father believed in knowing every detail of a project before it was started. He had always told Hans that three-fourths of a piece of furniture was a well-made set of plans.

Many times Hans had seen Father work on plans late into the night. Daylight in the shop was too precious to use it for drawing plans. Father had thought of this when he made the kitchen table because he made it big enough to lay out his ideas and work on them. Even though it was just the three of them, the table was big enough for six people to sit around. Mother did not like Father working at "her" kitchen table, but she knew how important it was to the family income, so she allowed it.

Hans was finishing up on the plans when he heard Mother in the kitchen. Quickly totaling the final figures and blotting the ink, he hurried so he could get the fire in the shop started before breakfast, which was the job of an apprentice. Hans rolled his plans up and placed them in the corner. He quickly got dressed because he didn't want to be late this morning. He wanted to have everything just right, so Father would be in a good mood to look at the tool chest plans. He ran to the kitchen and got some coals from the stove, then went to the shop to start the fire. While he was waiting for the coals to start the kindling, he went outside and got in enough wood for the day. The crispness of the morning air bit at his face, but he quickly worked so that he wouldn't notice. He got back upstairs just as Father was sitting down to eat.

"Good morning, Son," Father said. "Did you get the fire started?"

"Yes, Father, and I got enough wood in for the day."

"That's good because we have a lot of work to do today, but let's eat first."

As usual, the aroma of Mother's morning feast filled the room. Father enjoyed breakfast almost as much as he enjoyed the mornings. Hans didn't enjoy the morning, but he couldn't resist the smell of eggs, ham, and fresh rolls making their way from the kitchen.

"Father," Hans started cautiously, "could we talk for a little while before we go down to the shop this morning?"

"Well," Father quickly replied, "as a matter of fact, that was what I was planning on doing."

Father's willingness to linger over breakfast surprised Hans because Father always liked to get right to work in the morning. Father figured that they could visit while they worked which Hans always enjoyed. They had spent many hours in the shop working side by side and talking about everything from their work to the dreams that Hans had. Father never said a lot but patiently listened as Hans would spin a tale of the future and what he was going to do. Father never spoiled Hans' dreams and plans by replying to them with experience and reason. He always listened with an understanding heart. Father was always the first to hear of Hans' ideas, except for the tool chest he was planning to spring on him this morning. It was supposed to be a surprise, and Hans now wondered if Father had found his plans.

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"May I get something from my room first?" Hans asked.

"Of course," Father replied.

Hans quickly ran to his room and got the plans out of the corner. His hands trembled as he went over everything in his mind to double-check that they were complete. He took them back into the kitchen and laid them on his chair. He then started helping Mother clear the table, and Father watched with a chuckle. Father knew that something big was coming by the way Hans was acting. He thought that this would work out well because he had something very important to talk about also. As soon as the table was cleared, Hans picked up his plans and sat down. He couldn't hold his excitement any longer.

"Father," Hans began, "I only have two months left of my apprenticeship, and then I will be a journeyman. I want to go to the city and build furniture in one of the big shops, but I will need to supply my tools. I have most of the tools already, but I don't have a place to keep them. I have been working on some plans for a tool chest that I would like to show you. I think that I can complete the chest in my last two months, and it would be a perfect learning project for me. I'll need your help on some parts, but when I'm finished, I'll have much more experience."

"Well, Hans," Father said, "let's see these plans of yours."

Hans quickly unrolled his plans and laid them out on the table. He placed the main drawing of the tool chest right in front of Father. He was excited to see what his father thought because he had done his most excellent work on these plans. He kept watching Father's face to see his reaction. Frederick looked at the

master drawing and then began to look over the other ones. Finally, he looked at the list of materials and cost.

"Hans," Father said, "it will take me a few days to study these plans, but they look perfect. Before we decide to build this, let me tell you what I wanted."

"Is there something wrong with the plans?" Hans asked. "I know it's a difficult project, but I believe I can build it. I have saved enough money to buy the wood and fasteners. I don't mind reworking the plans at night if there is something wrong with them."

"Hans, Hans," Father interrupted, "the plans look fine, but I have something different to speak to you about."

"Oh," Hans sheepishly replied.

"You have two months left on your apprenticeship. As you know, at the end of that time you will be a journeyman, and that means you can go and work in any shop you want. It also means that you can work in the city as you have always dreamed. As your supervising craftsman, I can shorten or lengthen your apprenticeship as I choose. I have decided to add some time to your training."

"But Father," Hans protested, "I have done all that you asked of me and more.."

"Hear me out, Son. It is not just my responsibility to teach you about furniture making, but as your father, I have a responsibility to teach you about much more."

"What more could there be, Father?" Hans asked.

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"Hans, there are many things that you will face in the city shops that you have never faced here in our village. I have to be sure that your heart is ready for the things that you must face. I have spent the last seven years training your hands, but I must be sure that the training of your heart is also complete."

"Father, what are you saying?"

"I have arranged for you to spend the next seven months in seven different city workshops. I wrote to the craftsman at these shops, and they will each take you as an apprentice for a month. At the end of this time, you will return here and finish your last two months in my shop. I thought that you would be excited to go to the city and work in the big shops."

"Not like this, Father," Hans said in shock at what he was hearing, "I wanted to go to the city as a journeyman, not an apprentice. Besides, all of my friends will finish their apprenticeships this winter. If I go away for seven months and return here to finish, I won't be done until next fall. I already know as much or more than most journeymen. Why are you doing this to me?"

"Because I love you, Hans. You'll soon be sixteen, and I must be sure that you are ready to be a man."

"No, Father," Hans shouted. "You're doing this to me so that I will get discouraged and not finish. You're jealous because I want to go to the city and make something of myself instead of wasting away in this village as you have."

"Hans!" Mother exclaimed. "Your father is a great craftsman, and he loves you. How could you say this to him?"

"Because it's true, Mother!"

"I'm sorry that you feel this way, Son," his father said softly. "I truly believe that it is best. I will help you pack for your journey today. You have arrangements for travel tomorrow."

"Just like that, Father? I have no say in this? Fine, I'll prove to you it will not make me quit! I will finish my journey and come home for my certificate."

Father took a long breath and said quietly, "Hans, it is for you that I do this. I hope that you know that my only motive is love."

"I cannot believe that, Father," Hans said as he gathered up his drawings and went to his room. Mother was softly crying, and Father got up to hold her.

Hans could not believe Father was doing this to him. He had always thought of his father as a friend, and now he had turned on Hans. As he sat on his bed, tears of anger began to run down his cheeks. Father was not going to take his dream away. He would do what he must to get his journeyman's papers, and then he would be gone to the city for good. Never in his life could he have imagined such a betrayal from Father.

Father helped Hans that day to gather his belongings. They had to pack his clothes and tools together in one bag. Hans did not talk to Father once. When Father asked him if he thought that he should take one tool or another, Hans would just shrug his shoulders. He wanted Father to feel his anger and pain. He knew that he could hurt Father by not talking to him, and it was only fair since Father had delayed his plans by almost a year.

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That night, Father went over Hans' itinerary with him. He had written out the names of the towns, the location of the shops, the craftsmen's names, and how he would travel there. As usual, Father had every detail completed. Hans still had nothing to say but just sat and listened unemotionally as Father talked.

"I will take you to the pick-up place in the morning," Father said just as Hans was going to bed.

"Fine," Hans replied as he went to his room.

"I love you, Hans," Father said as Hans closed the door to his room. Hans did not respond.

Very early the next morning Hans awoke before anyone else. He got dressed and sat down to write a note. When he was finished, he picked up his bag and started to leave. Just as he was taking a last look at his room, he saw his plans on the floor where he had flung them the night before. He picked them up and carried them outside with him. As he crept away from the house, he threw the plans behind the woodpile and started for the road.

An hour later, Hans' father awoke and slowly sat up on the side of the bed. He so hoped that Hans' anger would have eased by this morning and that they could have a proper farewell. As he made his way to Hans' room, he started to knock on the door and found the note Hans had written hanging there.

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CHAPTER 1 DISCUSSION SUGGESTIONS

- From what you have read so far, describe the relationship Hans and Father have.
- Is there someone in your life whose approval you would really like to have? Who are they and why is their approval important to you?
- Do you think Hans responded to Father's plan in a mature manner? Do you think Hans' father was trying to do the right thing? Why?
- Do you ever have arguments at home? What kind of things do you argue about?
- What do you think Hans said in his note? What would you have said?
- We all have disappointments in our lives. How do you think you should process your disappointments? Does anger really solve anything? Explain.

The complete discussion guide is available as a free download via a QR code on the inside cover of the book.