

# CHAPTER I: WIZARD JASPER



Jasper was hard at work, his attention completely focused on the small, gray rock. It was an unremarkable rock, and anyone passing by would wonder at the attention he was giving it. Every once in awhile, he would give a satisfied grunt, consult a large book propped on the table, make some notes in his notebook, and then return to watching the small, gray rock. At times he would make a strange clicking noise with his tongue.

Jasper suddenly lifted his attention from his study of the rock as he saw from the corner of his eye his early warning system blaring a bright purple. He heaved a very unhappy sigh and began putting his equipment neatly away. Purple meant the King's Men were on their way. He had wondered if he would be called when he had heard that the Princess Sienna was missing. He went about packing a small, dark blue bag of supplies. Once he was satisfied with the contents, he went into his room and packed a



black bag of personal clothing and supplies. He then changed into his traveling clothes and laid a warm cloak across his arm. Jasper took everything into the main room and went to the kitchen to brew tea and wait.

It wasn't long after he had finished his tea and washed out his cup when he heard several horses trotting up his graveled roadway. The sound stopped, and he soon heard pounding on his front door.

"Open up in the name of the king!"

Opening his door, Jasper saw an imposing, slightly older, very big and brawny man in a soldier's uniform. "May I help you?" he asked.

"I'm looking for the wizard," the man stated gruffly. "Tell him the king requires his presence immediately!"

"You're the king?" Jasper asked mildly and a little bit wickedly. He knew that this soldier was not the king, but he disliked his attitude.

"Of course not, you idiot! I'm the king's man, and I need to speak with the wizard. Call him immediately, boy!"

"Well, now, I prefer to be called a student—" Jasper began.

"I don't care what you call yourself," the soldier interrupted rudely. "Just tell the wizard we are here to take him to the king! And don't dawdle, boy!"

Jasper looked at the rude man and thought about a recent spell he had come across. He had been wanting to test it out but...well, the truth was he didn't

know if he could turn the man back into a man after he had turned him into a toad. Jasper wisely decided that turning the king's man into a toad just for being stupid probably was not a good idea.

"Well, what are you waiting for, boy?" The man was getting very impatient.

Smiling thinly, Jasper said, "Perhaps I should introduce myself, sir. You see, I'm often called—"

Waving his arm about impatiently, the soldier pushed Jasper aside and entered the small house. "I don't care what you're called, kid. Wizard!" he yelled. "Come out in the name of the king!"

Sighing, Jasper yelled at the top of his lungs, which was very loud indeed since he used a little magic to enhance it, "*Here I am!*"

The soldier winced, clapped his hands over his ears, and fell back a few steps. The soldiers still standing outside had looks of shock on their faces, and then they grinned.

Finally the soldier looked at Jasper, then stuttered, "But...but...but..."

Jasper frowned and stated, "I'm afraid just repeating the word *but* several times does not communicate your message very well. Perhaps I can get you started. The king needs to see me...? Why?"

The soldier took a deep breath and then began again. "But...but...but you're just a kid!" he finally got out.

Jasper was very irritated now. *Perhaps turning this rude soldier into a toad wasn't such a bad idea after*

*all!* he thought, and then he saw the soldier's face whiten. "Uh oh, did I say that aloud?" From the look on the soldier's face, he had. "Let's start over, shall we? Most people call me Wizard Jasper. And you are?"

"An idiot!" the soldier said. "Please accept my apology. The king has asked that we"—he waved behind him at the soldiers—"escort you to the palace. He has heard that you are good at finding people who are lost, and his daughter has gone missing."

Jasper smiled at the soldier. "Your apology is accepted, and I am ready to go." Picking up his two bags, he looked at the soldier expectantly.

Eying the two bags, the soldier asked Jasper, "Were you planning on going somewhere?"

"Obviously," Jasper said. "With you if you're ready."

Shaking his head, the soldier decided to let it go. Who could understand the ways of wizards anyway? "By the way, I am Captain Hart, and this man behind me is my lieutenant, Gray. Do you know how to ride? We brought a horse for you, but if you can't ride..." he trailed off, looking at Jasper expectantly.

"I can ride. Let's go."

## CHAPTER 2: MEETING ROYALTY



Jasper was tired, and when he got tired he got cranky. It had taken them only three days of hard riding to get to the city, mostly because the captain had pushed them, insisting that every minute counted if the princess was to be found safely. They rode late into the night and were up at dawn every morning. Jasper was seriously reconsidering turning the pompous captain into a toad. Unfortunately that could upset King Elmer. Oh well, he thought. They didn't have far to go now to reach the palace gates anyway.

Just then the captain called a halt. He looked at Jasper and said, "We can't go to the palace looking and smelling this bad, so I arranged for us to have a bath and a change of clothing." He indicated a small entrance at the side of a building. Jasper smiled; the captain had finally shown some intelligence. He practically jumped from his horse to the doorway. "Let's go!" he said.

