

CHAPTER II

HAGHEDISSE

Haghedissee was living on a steep plateau now in front of Okizar that, recovered from his strange and untimely flight, had started the climb.

Immense firs and tangled wild pines were around the hut of the witch, transforming its branches into a thick tangle that was very hard to cross. But the one who dared and managed to do this could discover certain dark and cold site never touched by sunshine.

No bird was ever perched on branches of those trees; under them, multiple poisonous mushrooms pierced their roots and transformed them into sharp claws to fight against snakes and scorpions in an endless and vain battle just broken by orders of Haghedissee, lady and mistress of those lands, who welcomed him at the foot of the slope from which Okizar emerged.

“You are arriving at sunset and these are not good places to stay overnight.”

Okizar was ready and aware of the *casilleach*, certain repulsive, frightening and disgusting creatures; so, he was surprised not to see before him a creature of sharp-pointed teeth, very rheumy and purulent eyes, and pustules on the face. On the contrary, his blue eyes were big, shining and free of any pestilence; the wrinkled skin of his emaciated face was free of any disease; and his thin nose marked a little mouth full of somewhat stained and uneven teeth.

Haghedissee collected his hair at the nape with brambles and thorns, and at his neck marked by ugly scars there was a beautiful and effulgent black pearl necklace in contrast to the splendid whiteness of a rough texture covering her from shoulders to bare feet.

From the wide sleeves of her simple attire, some hands of thin fingers emerged, and ended at quite long and sharp-pointed nails. Her right hand held a twisted hazel wand, and the thumb of her left hand was grasped by a blackened raven; its motionless, cold and yellowish eyes stared at the gray eyes of the King.

“Haghedissee, leave your raven alone or I’ll kill it with my sword.”

“You are a fool, Okizar. I would disarm you in the blink of an eye. You would lose not only your sword, but even your life

“I did not come for any dispute with you, Haghedissee, but quite the contrary”, Okizar said, smoothing the voice. “I am here to ask humbly your help.”

“When may an Oki be humble with somebody from the Otherworld Kingdom, Bran?”, the witch ironically said to her raven that only replied

repeating its squawk several times. “Cannot your problem be solved by your friend and apprentice wizard, rather your Queen’s problem?”

“Here and now, I take off my pride before you, Haghedisse”, –the King replied firmly, staring at her and trying to find her elusive eyes but without finding them.

“Long, very long ago, Danaan, your grandparent’s father also asked my help. I believed him because I had a tremendous respect for him.” As she said this, a strange flash –just the memory of a deep love– illuminated her eyes, and finally Haghedisse said in a vibrant voice: “A feeling transformed into contempt and distrust”.

Okizar looked tired. He could not reply and made quietly his way to a log covered with moss and lichen, and then he sat down. Angered by this attitude, the witch ordered him to stand in front of her.

“Nobody has ever told you to sit down! Stand in front of me if you want to be heard! You are here a nonentity, just a pauper without kingdom or offspring!”

The King obeys the order. If he wants to get what he has come to look for, he should be cautious and even submissive. He leans his body on a battered larch, crosses his arms and, after a deep sigh, he asks:

“Can you tell me what happened at the time of the great King Danaan, when the margonts invaded those lands?”

Haghedisse turned her back hunched by years and resentment. Bran flew toward a lush rowal in front of Okizar, intending not to lose track of him as he was doing since the King entered the forest.

The sun was hiding in the mountains, and the west was covered with so intense purplish pink hue that transformed the thick green of the jungle into an immense and vaporous cloud of the same hue.

Haghedisse aimed her wand at the marvelous sky, and strange scenes began to emerge.

Some strange beings, of huge bodies covered with black leather, descended from immense ships; their sails were made of a thin skin shining at the moonlight, because some of them were made of human skin, and others, of beings that were living prisoners writhed in pain and despair. They carried swords and effulgent spears of powerful sparkles, and their shields had a trident sign engraved. They were noiseless beings, moved stealthily, and their communication was by sign language: they were margonts that at the time of Okizar would appear sculpted like frightening figures that only could be compared with demons fed on human flesh.

Suddenly, that scene of margonts going ashore vanished, and a beautiful woman, of dark and loose hair to the wind, mounted on a sweaty colt, galloped to enter the big gate of an impressive castle. The

gate opened by enchantment, and at once a man came and welcomed and warmly embraced her: he was the great King Danaan and she was Haghedissee.

These two figures walked away, while it was heard the woman to say:

“Invaders have arrived to our lands; they are thousands and come strongly armed: they belong to the Unknown World, and are extremely powerful and fierce.”

The army of the great King Danaan was prepared for defence, and his warriors were ready expecting orders. There was no fear in their faces: their metal breastplates and helmets would protect them, but their King, infusing them an absolute calm, rode toward his cavalry armed with long swords and to his infantry entirely covered with big and heavy shields, in order to give them instructions and mainly trust:

“Know you are not alone: these holy lands are protected by the gods! They will fight beside us!”

No oki had ever seen a margont: these beings walked heavily on their two legs covered with some kind of black leather that also covered entirely their bodies from neck to toes. They were higher than an oak a hundred year old, and in fact their faces could not be seen because they were covered with a kind of mask made of a shining metal; their hands were holding swords, hooks and chains with heavy balls full of sharp spits.

Okizar was amazed at the sight of the first margonts. The magic of Haghedissee had attracted them. But he felt safer leaning his body on the trunk of a tree and extended his left arm on a low branch seeking a point of support to unsheathe his sword.

One of them fought against the power of Haghedissee's wand in order to return from the dead and take her to past times: the battle field was a massacre of blood and pain; thousands of margonts and okis were lying on the fertile ground of the valley horrified by such great slaughter.

After this bloody combat, decimated armies of margonts retreated to the sea and disappeared into the mist.

A few battered okis survived and returned to the castle, believing that everything was over, but it was not so; under a huge Moon that seemed to devour them with its icy sparkles, the Eye in the Cauldron of the Truth opened and Haghedissee predicted that about twenty ships would cross the waters of the sea to join the survivors, going ashore in less than seven moons if the winds were favorable.

The Cauldron of the Truth closed its Eye and Haghedissee emerged again from the past moving ahead beside her handsome son, Garlad. At

the same time, another old boy that apparently held him in great esteem, came to Garland and, after an affectionate embrace, the two went away.

This young man was the Prince Govannon, Danaan's son, who with his face racked in grief, asked Haghedissee:

"Take my sons, the Prince Govannon and the little Corrigan, to the Kingdom of Otherworld; your father, King of Sidhe, the great Finvana, will welcome them... Here they are at great risk in my castle. Without an army, I cannot stop the invaders: the Kingdom of the Okis will disappear."

The blue eyes of the beautiful Haghedissee were illuminated:

"I will ask my people to fight this war. This very night, I will gather them in assembly at the Great Hill; you can be sure that even the very Lord of the Forest will be present."

"Will you do that for us?"

And her eyes replied; "For you, only for you."

Danaan knelt down quite solemnly before her and kissed the hem of her silvery gown where glittering stars were sleeping their night sleep since she was born.

Haghedissee recalled those days when, being even children, many times they had met in the forest on the quiet of their elders, dreaming of someday the Kingdom of the Otherworld and the Kingdom of the Okis could live in harmony.

Danaan and Haghedissee vanished and instead there were images of a scene that Okizar, still standing and leaned on the trunk of that tree, left him speechless:

The King of the Forest illuminated the place with such an intense and green radiance that the faces and bodies of all those present were tinged with that color.

That light, without an accurate form, suddenly could appear like circles united to shape a large pulsating sphere, or be manifested like a burst of minute spikes falling like a heavy rain of emeralds.

Beautiful dryads of little silvery wings were flying in the midst of that energy; they were very excited seeing so many people from the Kingdom of the Otherworld that were assembled there, and on a fallen log of a yew, that still was alive, the old Schrat was looking around with distrust.

A pixie that was even greener because of the prevailing radiance sharpened the nails of his long fingers on the branch of an oak; from there, several puckies were seated and wagging their little legs while conversing and laughing under breath.

Several ugly as well as unpredictable tangans, metamorphosed and swelled, became monsters before the disdainful glances of an entourage of very beautiful gwragedd annum that, standing, were floating on the greenish air whose scent was a mixture of mint, saffron, and seeds of henbane and poppy, that some witches, somewhat apart from the rest, were burning in their cauldron.

Suddenly, the ground trembled and amid broken branches that rustled, several giants appeared; they were armed with oversized cudgels, wore winged helmets on their heads, and one of them, their King, wore a resplendent breastplate that multiplied the emerald light into countless blinding flashes.

As Haghedissee saw them coming, she headed to welcome:

“Welcome, Thurs. O King of the Giants, we are honored by your presence!”

The King said in a thunderous voice: “We are aware of invaders coming from the Unknown World; they had decimated the troops of Danaan, Great King of the Okis, and many more are coming. Haghedissee, before your call I have descended from the North Mountains with my army because a giant never forgets a favor”.

Donagh, Queen of the Fairies, stepped forward interrupting: “We owe nothing to Haghedissee”, and while moving lightly backward her gorgeous blond hair with her porcelain hands, she continued: “We do not want to be involved in the cause of Danaan”.

A witch screamed from the bottom: “Because Danaan did not choose you”.

The puckies laughed brazenly, and the tangans, transformed into horrible winged serpents, burst out laughing and began to turn around the fairies, while the latter protected themselves in haste behind a circle made with magic powders uttering indecipherable incantations with their crystalline voices.

The old Schrat began to ululate in a way as uncontrolled as to make a gnome that was more angry than usually to run and threat him with a branch of alder.

In a loud voice, the witches were commenting against Donagh, Queen of the Fairies, and a great party of pixies began to throw right and left acorns, nuts and missiles of any kind that their green mouths erupted while emitting acute hisses like a military march.

The party of coblynaus joined the revelry and began to dance with thin legs that were supporting their dysmorphic bodies of short arms and bulky bellies.

Two four-footed creatures ran for refuge behind an oak, and they were escaping when collided with leprechauns willing to join the party.

This meeting became a real riot and just a shy urisk, looking with his big kind eyes at those who were beside him, as in search of protection, remained quiet. He was seated next to a group of phenodeers that, leaned on their sharp sickles, were jiggling and did not understand anything about what was happening there.

While the King of the Forest took the shape of a beautiful rowan of red fruits, he said:

“My children: stop playing and let us welcome our friends, the dwarves.”

All of them kept silent. From the green mist, figures of dwarves began to emerge. Some of them came mounted on lebirs and on deer, but most of them came on foot.

An “O...” was heard when finally the figure of the legendary Bergleute appeared in the entourage; even Donagh, Queen of the Fairies, was excited, and even the shameful urisk approached a bit to bow down.

Haghedissee had behaved the same way with the King of the Giants; she had for Bergleute a great and sincere affection; so she welcomed him being nearer to him.

“Welcome, Bergleute, King of the Dwarves”, and later she whispered in his ear: “I feared that you would not come...”

“I never missed an appointment with a lady and, if I am late, it is because today my beloved and only son is born and I called him Hornbori”, the King of the Dwarves exclaimed with great emotion.

She had just said her son’s name when the fantastic green cloud was around and enveloped him in a shining spiral, and carried him carefully to the high branch of an alder and later to branches of an oak, later to those of an ash, and finally to those of a haze to make him fall again in the center.

Bergleute held in his hands a little cradle made of magical woods for a long, happy and fruitful life and for being remembered like something great like his father: the generous, noble and brave Bergleute, the exterminator of trolls that, many years ago, had jeopardized the Kingdom of the Otherworld.

Calmed down, the King of the Forest became a very old tree; it was as old as the first tree in the World; its trunk was full of cracks and deep crevices; some nice and killmoulis emerged because they had no idea about where they were or what was all that. Then, he asked Haghedissee solemnly to start the assembly.

“Gorgeous Haghedissee, Lady of the Magic, daughter of Taltiu and Finvana, tell us why did you summon us.”

Okizar, King of the Okis, looked enraptured at the beautiful woman of indescribable face and very pure voice that left ecstatic to everyone

present. Later, he made a halt for a while at the present lonely, dark and hunched figure that, her back to him, manipulated the wand in such a way that she was able to transform the past into future. How this extraordinary change could occur?

The pixies, that are prone to heavy jokes and impertinences, remained curled up and motionless under a big fern, and the old Schrat emerged slowly crawling toward a soft and fresh mattress of flowers that was growing at some few yards from where Hagedhisse was standing ready to begin to talk:

“Lord of the Forest, thank you for allowing me this assembly in the kingdom that with your mighty strength you have formed and that without your love would not exist... Unfortunately, I have no good news: the troops of the King Danaon are decimated and he has no okis to fight. After few days, thousands of margonts will come and annihilate this land. Apparently, they are horrific and cruel beings that will annihilate the okis, and also us.

“Why are you so sure that our kingdom will be attacked”, the powerful and enigmatic fairy Leanan asked; until that moment she had remained apart.

“I have seen it in the Eye of the Cauldron of the Truth,” Hagedhisse stated in a vibrating voice.

“I have seen a big fire,” one of the gwragedd annwn said in a trembling voice. “I have seen it with the Mirror of Water, tinged of red.”

“We will not allow occurring!”, Thurs, King of the Giants shouted, “and nobody will destroy our home because my people will not allow it””

“Neither my people will do!. ” It was Bergleute, King of the Dwarves, who shouted, unsheathing his sword.

All of them shouted in chorus, and a clamor of war sounded in the night.

But the Queen of the Fairies remained apart, and when the spirits calmed down, she said:

“I want to set aside old discrepancies that, after all, are involving only your father, Finvana, and me, his wife. In the Kingdom of the Otherworld, we all are aware of your love for Danaan, King of the Okis. A proof of it is that son that you gave him: Garlad. Are you asking of us to defend our kingdom, or wishing to save the life of Danaan?”

There was a great silence. The dryads were restless and the musical tinkle of their little wings was broken as if bubbles of minute crystal were bursting in a silent environment.

Certain dryads flew toward Haghedisse and perched on her head and shoulders. Others began to play lovingly with her hair and to plait it, mingling into it petals of primroses and campanulas.

The King of the Forest looked at her with big eyes full of understanding. From its poor treetop, the owl hissed beating its wings and a killmouli began to place some very red serbos into its big nose intending to feed on them.

“I appreciate, Donagh, Queen of the Fairies, your questioning. It is not easy to be here calling them for war, because we the inhabitants of the Kingdom of the Otherworld are not prone to battle. I cannot deny my love for the Great King of the Okis and that I have chosen him to beget the only son I’ll can have in my whole lifetime,” Haghedisse replied extending her arms; the latter emanated a bluish and ethereal light toward everyone present there; then she touched lightly her silvery skirt that burst into shining and iridescent radiations. Then she continued: “And I do not wish his death, but what I have seen in the Eye of the Cauldron of the Truth is true... The margonts also will come for us and if we are not united, our kingdom will vanish, because the invaders have been sent by the Shadow Lord.”

“Why did not you tell this since the beginning”, Donagh was horrified, “if the Shadow Lord has sent them, it is because he is looking for something more than our destruction!”

“As usual, beloved wife, you are right,” it was a voice of a big purple mushroom coming toward Haghedisse; in no time, it became a beautiful creature of rich attire, glittering crown, white beard and vermilion cloak.

“My father, what joy to meet you here!”, Haghedisse exclaimed, while extending her hands toward him.

Finvana, the handsome King of the Sidhe, took the fingertips of her daughter and kissed them. Everyone present made a long reverence, and the King accepted it with a wide and cultivated smile. Later, he said:

“The Shadow Lord wants an absolute power that he only can get when and if he confronts the two swords: the South Sword, today under guards of the great Bergleute, King of the Dwarves and the North Sword, hidden from the eyes of the living ones, but that must be revealed if the Shadow Lord gets it. If those two forces are confronted, everything that is known will perish.”

“The margonts are an instrument to get it: are you saying it?”, Turs, Great King of the Giants asked.“

Finvana said: “Yesterday it was instrumented by trolls, today it is instrumented by margonts, and tomorrow just the gods know. The South Sword must be taken up by someone noble and brave, of a generous heart with others, but austere with himself, and deprived of any pride

and vanity. While Bergleute has those qualities, he should give it to another person, as the tradition says, to continue the work but not perpetuated in that purpose; but nobody can force him to give the sword to anyone because that is his decision, therefore his own responsibility.”

The fairy Leanan said: “You are the Great King of the Sidhe, and your opinion is of our interest”.”

“It is fair what Haghedissee is asking. I am afraid if we are not united, all kingdoms may be jeopardized,” Finvana said in a vibrating voice.

“So, we’ll be united”, Iotunn, King of the Ogres shouted; until then he had remained, with his retinue, hidden in the dark of the forest, some few yards from there.

Donagh was intimidated by the terrible face of Iotunn because in the past his sisters had been abducted by ogres, whose ugly faces and unpleasant smell could not be easily forgotten, but he encouraged an annis that shouted:

“I still did not try flesh of a margont. I promise to eat someone of them alive!”

Suddenly the amber light illuminated the environment and from the top, blue petals began to fall. A sweet perfume spread across every corner; its effect was calming, almost hypnotic.

As the ground was covered by flowers and there was no place to cover, a little being appeared magically; he was riding on a little horse of green legs.

This character came alone. He wore simple unadorned riding clothes, had a horn and hazel wand at his waist, and a patent leather pouch across the body. His eyes were shining like two black pearls; and his glance was intelligent and shrewd. Nostrils of his flat nose moved to the beat of his breathing; his big mouth of thin lips was barely curved in a shy smile, and his blackened hair, which was hard as bristles, emerged carelessly from his picked holey hat.

“Iubdan, Great King of the Leprechaums, welcome to this assembly! Your presence gratifies us and gives us confidence! We expect your wise advices!”, Haghedissee exclaimed, while she headed toward him with her hands extended.

Iubdan dismounted, and a crosier emerged from his hand; it was the thick branch of an ash tree that, when he placed it on the ground, was full of very green little leaves.

When Iubdan was before the Lady of Magic, he stood on tiptoe, took respectfully her hands and kissed them.

“I appreciate your words, beautiful lady, because I know they are as sincere as your conviction that our unique choice is to confront the invaders. Doubtlessly, what you have seen in the Cauldron of the Truth agrees with your own sayings. I know no lie can come from your

mouth... But... even should not deceive yourselves, weapons are nefarious instruments!”, Iubdan said in a trembling voice.

Bergleute interrupted: “With due respect, we did not defeat the trolls with flowers!”

“The One wished for you, my Great Lord, to take away the South Sword from Ahriman... The war against the trolls was, without any detriment to you, a minor war. Today, the margonts are centuplicated in number and weapons. I want to tell you that you won’t go to a party but to a slaughter.

“Is your suggestion to leave the King of the Okis to his fate?”, Bergleute asked. His voice was loud and sure amid whispers and muted exclamations.

“I mean the honest men only use weapons if necessary and politely, without joy for victory. A man that enjoys victory enjoys death of beings created by the One, and the one who enjoys for that reason, cannot prevail in the World*.”

Bergleute indignantly exclaimed: “How could I not be happy after killing those miserable trolls? Three hundred cycles had passed and the Shadow Lord had not come back”.

“But he came back and will ever come back until the time when the World understands that the site of honor for great events is to left, and right for tragic events. The site for the second chief is left, and for the first chief right, a place reserved for funereal rites. The one who killed deserves to weep with sorrow and sadness, and should not be proud of it. A victory in war should be followed by a funereal rite*”, Iubdan said in a voice calm and soft.

“Lord, with great respect, the Cauldron of the Truth opened its Eye and showed me what would happen...”, Haghedisse muttered, “What should we do?”

“The wheel is moving again. There is no worse danger than underestimation of the enemy; that is why the most afflicted army is the winner. But this army, here constituted is not afflicted by war, but willing to reach the victory. A good military man is not warlike, a good warrior is not irascible, a good vanquisher averts war, and a good leader of peoples is subject to these peoples. Here is the virtue of not fighting in order to lead peoples; here is the most perfect way to join the rule of Heaven*. Iubdan said this while his black eyes were vivaciously looking at his audience.

* Thoughts based in Lao Tzu’s thoughts (VI Century B.C.) *Tao Te King*. Vedral Editions, Spain, 2002.

"I am greatly grieved by war," the urisk muttered while he approached to Iubdan.

"Also we do," certain little elves said.

"Finvana said the one who holds the South Sword should be a noble and brave person, of generous heart with others but austere with himself, and without pride and vanity... You are not that person, Bergleute! The One has given you a chance, but you gave yourself airs with death! You, the first chief, seated to left, celebrated the victory! Many, almost all, wished to be like you. Today we are in war again," Iubdam said, while pointing at the Great King of the Dwarves with his crosier.

Bergleute was incensed but after looking at faces of others, he realized Iubdan was right. But also it was true that he had not made anything with bad intention, but acting and feeling only in agreement with his feelings and convictions. Who could not enjoy the death of an enemy? Who could not be flattered for being called hero and treated as such?

"Only thorns and bushes can there be where troops have camped, and years of sorrow will come after armies, Iubdan", Bergleute said. "But the margonts are here and must be fought!"

"May the One guide you, Great King of the Dwarves, when you choose the addressee of the Sword being yourself unworthy of it" The wheel is spinning and the war is unavoidable now", Iubdan replied, while mounting his horse of green legs.

The King of the Leprechauns greeted Haghedisse with a nod. Later, he softly his crosier and disappeared from view.

Those who were present remained in silence because the words of Iubdan had impressed them. The sword meant much more than victory; the right use of the sword meant peace for all peoples.

But something was getting near to all those gathered in assembly: a bewildering noise, mixture of mournful laments, uneven hisses and monotonous clicks of wings put the gnomes, leprechauns and puckies on alert, and they left the scene; then the dwarves unsheathed their swords and Haghedisse, with a movement of her hands, created a scintillating blue light that illuminated entirely the newcomers. It was the Unhappy Retinue, also called Host, which burst into the assembly and flew over the heads of everyone present, and emitting plaintive screams descended in circle and landed in the center.

All of them were flying and apparently chained to each other like a rosary of bodies and faces intermingled without any order because there were creatures of two heads and four arms, but without body, of many sharp-edged claws without members to support them, or of a complete winged bat body, full of shreds and holes, while flying and looking anxiously for its lost head at the end of the chain. But being leaned on the ground they became almost skeletal creatures that looked naked and

very weak to breathe. All of them had wings and almost could not stand because moved to all sides and had to skip and beat their wings of bats to remain erect not to fall face downward into the ground:

“Daughter of Taitiu and Finvana, Lady of Magic, the Host is ready to fight against the intruders. I have no weapons like the dwarves, ogres and giants do, but our claws and poisonous bites are redoubtable. In the Kingdom of the Otherworld and in that of the okis, everybody knows a prey chosen by us never can flee. We are not going to fight defending the okis because they were our prey and thus will remain until the end of the battle, but our combat will be for our Kingdom, if necessary, to death, because you know well, Haghedissee, that our existence is not infinite, as it occurs with some creatures in the Kingdom of the Otherworld.

When the Host appeared, any doubt about being involved in the war came to an end.. Iubdan had said: “The wheel is moving again”. Some few understood his message.

The Great War, the war against the margonts had started: it would be the war that future generations would remember like the most frightful and cruel of all.