



Three hunters. Three lethal flint weapons. All aimed at him.

Torak's mind whirled. He couldn't move. Couldn't see Wolf.

The man gripping his jerkin was enormous. His russet beard was a bird's nest tangle; one cheek was pulled downwards by an ugly scar, and whatever had bitten him had taken off one ear. In his free hand he held a flint-edged knife, its point jabbed under Torak's jaw.

Beside him stood a tall young man, and a girl about Torak's own age: both had dark-red hair, smooth, pitiless faces, and flint arrows trained on his heart.

He tried to swallow. He hoped he didn't look as scared as he felt. 'Let me go,' he gasped. He took a swing at the big man and missed.

The big man grunted. 'So here's our thief!' He hoisted Torak higher - chokingly high.

'I'm not - a thief!' coughed Torak, snatching at his throat.

'He's lying,' the young man said coldly.

'You took our roe buck,' said the girl. To the big man she said, 'Oslak, I think you're choking him.'

Oslak set Torak on his feet. But he didn't loosen his hold, and his knife stayed at Torak's throat.

Carefully, the girl replaced her arrow in her quiver, and shouldered her bow. The young man did not. From the gleam in his eyes, it was clear that he was enjoying himself. He wouldn't hesitate to shoot.

Torak coughed and rubbed his throat, surreptitiously reaching for his knife.

'I'll take that,' said Oslak. Still gripping Torak, he relieved him of his weapons and tossed them to the girl.

She studied Fa's knife curiously. 'Did you steal this too?'

'No!' said Torak. 'It - it was my father's.'

Clearly, they didn't believe him.