

PART ONE

SENDARIA

Chapter One

The first thing the boy Garion remembered was the kitchen at Faldor's farm. For all the rest of his life he had a special warm feeling for kitchens and those peculiar sounds and smells that seemed somehow to combine into a bustling seriousness that had to do with love and food and comfort and security and, above all, home. No matter how high Garion rose in life, he never forgot that all his memories began in that kitchen.

The kitchen at Faldor's farm was a large, low-beamed room filled with ovens and kettles and great spits that turned slowly in cavernlike arched fireplaces. There were long, heavy worktables where bread was kneaded into loaves and chickens were cut up and carrots and celery were diced with quick, crisp rocking movements of long, curved knives. When Garion was very small, he played under those tables and soon learned to keep his fingers and toes out from under the feet of the kitchen helpers who worked around them. And sometimes in the late afternoon when he grew tired, he would lie in a corner and stare into one of the flickering fires that gleamed and reflected back from the hundred polished pots and knives and long-handled spoons that hung from pegs along the whitewashed walls and, all bemused, he would drift off into sleep in perfect peace and harmony with all the world around him.

The center of the kitchen and everything that happened there was Aunt Pol. She seemed somehow to be able to be everywhere at once. The finishing touch that plumped a goose in its roasting pan or deftly shaped a rising loaf or garnished a smoking ham fresh from the oven was always hers. Though there were several others who worked in the kitchen, no loaf, stew, soup, roast, or vegetable ever went out of it that had not been touched at least once by Aunt Pol. She knew by smell, taste, or some higher instinct what each dish required, and she seasoned them all by pinch or trace or a negligent-seeming shake from earthenware spice pots. It was as if there was a kind of magic about her, a knowledge and power beyond that of ordinary people. And yet, even at her busiest, she always knew precisely where Garion was. In the very midst of crimping a pie crust or decorating a special cake or stitching up a freshly stuffed chicken she could, without looking, reach out a leg and hook him back out from under the feet of others with heel or ankle.

As he grew a bit older, it even became a game. Garion would watch until she seemed far too busy to notice him, and then, laughing, he would run on his sturdy little legs toward a door. But she would always catch him. And he would laugh and throw his arms around her neck and kiss her and then go back to watching for his next chance to run away again.

He was quite convinced in those early years that his Aunt Pol was quite the most important and beautiful woman in the world. For one thing, she was taller than the other women on Faldor's farm – very nearly as tall as a man – and her face was always serious – even stern – except with him, of course. Her hair was long and very

dark – almost black – all but one lock just above her left brow which was white as new snow. At night when she tucked him into the little bed close beside her own in their private room above the kitchen, he would reach out and touch that white lock; she would smile at him and touch his face with a soft hand. Then he would sleep, content in the knowledge that she was there, watching over him.

Faldor's farm lay very nearly in the center of Sendaria, a misty kingdom bordered on the west by the Sea of the Winds and on the east by the Gulf of Cherek. Like all farmhouses in that particular time and place, Faldor's farmstead was not one building or two, but rather was a solidly constructed complex of sheds and barns and hen roosts and dovecotes all facing inward upon a central yard with a stout gate at the front. Along the second storey gallery were the rooms, some spacious, some quite tiny, in which lived the farmhands who tilled and planted and weeded the extensive fields beyond the walls. Faldor himself lived in quarters in the square tower above the central dining hall where his workers assembled three times a day – sometimes four during harvest time – to feast on the bounty of Aunt Pol's kitchen.

All in all, it was quite a happy and harmonious place. Farmer Faldor was a good master. He was a tall, serious man with a long nose and an even longer jaw. Though he seldom laughed or even smiled, he was kindly to those who worked for him and seemed more intent on maintaining them all in health and well-being than extracting the last possible ounce of sweat from them. In many ways he was more like a father than a master to the sixty-odd people who lived on his freeholding. He ate with them – which was unusual since many farmers in

the district sought to hold themselves aloof from their workers – and his presence at the head of the central table in the dining hall exerted a restraining influence on some of the younger ones who tended sometimes to be boisterous. Farmer Faldor was a devout man, and he invariably invoked with simple eloquence the blessing of the Gods before each meal. The people of his farm, knowing this, filed with some decorum into the dining hall before each meal and sat in the semblance at least of piety before attacking the heaping platters and bowls of food that Aunt Pol and her helpers had placed before them.

Because of Faldor's good heart – and the magic of Aunt Pol's deft fingers – the farm was known throughout the district as the finest place to live and work for twenty leagues in any direction. Whole evenings were spent in the tavern in the nearby village of Upper Graft in minute descriptions of the near-miraculous meals served regularly in Faldor's dining hall. Less fortunate men who worked at other farms were frequently seen, after several pots of ale, to weep openly at descriptions of one of Aunt Pol's roasted geese, and the fame of Faldor's farm spread wide throughout the district.

The most important man on the farm, aside from Faldor, was Durnik the smith. As Garion grew older and was allowed to move out from under Aunt Pol's watchful eye, he found his way inevitably to the smithy. The glowing iron that came from Durnik's forge had an almost hypnotic attraction for him. Durnik was an ordinary-looking man with plain brown hair and a plain face, ruddy from the heat of his forge. He was neither tall nor short, nor was he thin or stout. He was sober and quiet, and like most men who follow his trade, he was

enormously strong. He wore a rough leather jerkin and an apron of the same material. Both were spotted with burns from the sparks which flew from his forge. He also wore tight-fitting hose and soft leather boots as was the custom in that part of Sendaria. At first Durnik's only words to Garion were warnings to keep his fingers away from the forge and the glowing metal which came from it. In time, however, he and the boy became friends, and he spoke more frequently.

'Always finish what you set your hand to,' he would advise. 'It's bad for the iron if you set it aside and then take it back to the fire more than is needful.'

'Why is that?' Garion would ask.

Durnik would shrug. 'It just is.'

'Always do the very best job you can,' he said on another occasion as he put a last few finishing touches with a file on the metal parts of a wagon tongue he was repairing.

'But that piece goes underneath,' Garion said. 'No-one will ever see it.'

'But *I* know it's there,' Durnik said, still smoothing the metal. 'If it isn't done as well as I can do it, I'll be ashamed every time I see this wagon go by – and I'll see the wagon every day!'

And so it went. Without even intending to, Durnik instructed the small boy in those solid Sendarian virtues of work, thrift, sobriety, good manners, and practicality which formed the backbone of the society.

At first Aunt Pol worried about Garion's attraction to the smithy with its obvious dangers; but after watching from her kitchen door for a while, she realized that Durnik was almost as watchful of Garion's safety as she was herself and she became less concerned.

‘If the boy becomes pestersome, Goodman Durnik, send him away,’ she told the smith on one occasion when she had brought a large copper kettle to the smithy to be patched, ‘or tell me, and I’ll keep him closer to the kitchen.’

‘He’s no bother, Mistress Pol,’ Durnik said, smiling. ‘He’s a sensible boy and knows enough to keep out of the way.’

‘You’re too good-natured, friend Durnik,’ Aunt Pol said. ‘The boy is full of questions. Answer one and a dozen more pour out.’

‘That’s the way of boys,’ Durnik said, carefully pouring bubbling metal into the small clay ring he’d placed around the tiny hole in the bottom of the kettle. ‘I was questionsome myself when I was a boy. My father and old Barl, the smith who taught me, were patient enough to answer what they could. I’d repay them poorly if I didn’t have the same patience with Garion.’

Garion, who was sitting nearby, had held his breath during this conversation. He knew that one wrong word on either side would have instantly banished him from the smithy. As Aunt Pol walked back across the hard-packed dirt of the yard toward her kitchen with the new-mended kettle, he noticed the way that Durnik watched her, and an idea began to form in his mind. It was a simple idea, and the beauty of it was that it provided something for everyone.

‘Aunt Pol,’ he said that night, wincing as she washed one of his ears with a rough cloth.

‘Yes?’ she said, turning her attention to his neck.

‘Why don’t you marry Durnik?’

She stopped washing. ‘What?’ she asked.

‘I think it would be an awfully good idea.’

‘Oh, do you?’ Her voice had a slight edge to it, and Garion knew he was on dangerous ground.

‘He likes you,’ he said defensively.

‘And I suppose you’ve already discussed this with him?’

‘No,’ he said. ‘I thought I’d talk to you about it first.’

‘At least *that* was a good idea.’

‘I can tell him about it tomorrow morning, if you’d like.’

His head was turned around quite firmly by one ear. Aunt Pol, Garion felt, found his ears far too convenient.

‘Don’t you so much as breathe one word of this nonsense to Durnik or anyone else,’ she said, her dark eyes burning into his with a fire he had never seen there before.

‘It was only a thought,’ he said quickly.

‘A very bad one. From now on leave thinking to grown-ups.’ She was still holding his ear.

‘Anything you say,’ he agreed hastily.

Later that night, however, when they lay in their beds in the quiet darkness, he approached the problem obliquely.

‘Aunt Pol?’

‘Yes?’

‘Since you don’t want to marry Durnik, whom do you want to marry?’

‘Garion,’ she said.

‘Yes?’

‘Close your mouth and go to sleep.’

‘I think I’ve got a right to know,’ he said in an injured tone.

‘*Garion!*’

‘All right. I’m going to sleep, but I don’t think you’re being very fair about all this.’

She drew in a deep breath. 'Very well,' she said. 'I'm not thinking of getting married. I have never thought of getting married and I seriously doubt that I'll ever think of getting married. I have far too many important things to attend to for any of that.'

'Don't worry, Aunt Pol,' he said, wanting to put her mind at ease. 'When I grow up, *I'll* marry you.'

She laughed then, a deep, rich laugh, and reached out to touch his face in the darkness. 'Oh no, my Garion,' she said. 'There's another wife in store for you.'

'Who?' he demanded.

'You'll find out,' she said mysteriously. 'Now go to sleep.'

'Aunt Pol?'

'Yes?'

'Where's my mother?' It was a question he had been meaning to ask for quite some time.

There was a long pause, then Aunt Pol sighed. 'She died,' she said quietly.

Garion felt a sudden wrenching surge of grief, an unbearable anguish. He began to cry.

And then she was beside his bed. She knelt on the floor and put her arms around him. Finally, a long time later, after she had carried him to her own bed and held him close until his grief had run its course, Garion asked brokenly, 'What was she like? My mother?'

'She was fair-haired,' Aunt Pol said, 'and very young and very beautiful. Her voice was gentle, and she was very happy.'

'Did she love me?'

'More than you could imagine.'

And then he cried again, but his crying was quieter now, more regretful than anguished.

Aunt Pol held him closely until he cried himself to sleep.

There were other children on Faldor's farm, as was only natural in a community of sixty or so. The older ones on the farm all worked, but there were three other children of about Garion's age on the freeholding. These three became his playmates and his friends.

The oldest boy was named Rundorig. He was a year or two older than Garion and quite a bit taller. Ordinarily, since he was the eldest of the children, Rundorig would have been their leader; but because he was an Arend, his sense was a bit limited and he cheerfully deferred to the younger ones. The kingdom of Sendaria, unlike other kingdoms, was inhabited by a broad variety of racial stocks. Chereks, Algars, Drasnians, Arends, and even a substantial number of Tolnedrans had merged to form the elemental Sendar. Arends, of course, were very brave, but were also notoriously thick-witted.

Garion's second playmate was Doroon, a small, quick boy whose background was so mixed that he could only be called a Sendar. The most notable thing about Doroon was the fact that he was always running; he never walked if he could run. Like his feet, his mind seemed to tumble over itself, and his tongue as well. He talked continually and very fast and he was always excited.

The undisputed leader of the little foursome was the girl Zubrette, a golden-haired charmer who invented their games, made up stories to tell them, and set them to stealing apples and plums from Faldor's orchard for her. She ruled them as a little queen, playing one against the other and inciting them into fights. She was quite heartless, and each of the three boys at times hated her

even while remaining helpless thralls to her tiniest whim.

In the winter they slid on wide boards down the snowy hillside behind the farmhouse and returned home, wet and snow-covered, with chapped hands and glowing cheeks as evening's purple shadows crept across the snow. Or, after Durnik the smith had proclaimed the ice safe, they would slide endlessly across the frozen pond that lay glittering frostily in a little dale just to the east of the farm buildings along the road to Upper Gralt. And, if the weather was too cold or on toward spring when rains and warm winds had made the snow slushy and the pond unsafe, they would gather in the hay barn and leap by the hour from the loft into the soft hay beneath, filling their hair with chaff and their noses with dust that smelled of summer.

In the spring they caught polliwogs along the marshy edges of the pond and climbed trees to stare in wonder at the tiny blue eggs the birds had laid in twiggy nests in the high branches.

It was Doroon, naturally, who fell from a tree and broke his arm one fine spring morning when Zubrette urged him into the highest branches of a tree near the edge of the pond. Since Rundorig stood helplessly gaping at his injured friend and Zubrette had run away almost before he hit the ground, it fell to Garion to make certain necessary decisions. Gravely he considered the situation for a few moments, his young face seriously intent beneath his shock of sandy hair. The arm was obviously broken, and Doroon, pale and frightened, bit his lip to keep from crying.

A movement caught Garion's eye, and he glanced up quickly. A man in a dark cloak sat astride a large black horse not far away, watching intently. When their eyes

met, Garion felt a momentary chill, and he knew that he had seen the man before – that indeed that dark figure had hovered on the edge of his vision for as long as he could remember, never speaking, but always watching. There was in that silent scrutiny a kind of cold animosity curiously mingled with something that was almost, but not quite, fear. Then Doroon whimpered, and Garion turned back.

Carefully he bound the injured arm across the front of Doroon's body with his rope belt, and then he and Rundorig helped the injured boy to his feet.

'At least he could have helped us,' Garion said resentfully.

'Who?' Rundorig said, looking around.

Garion turned to point at the dark-cloaked man, but the rider was gone.

'I didn't see anyone,' Rundorig said.

'It hurts,' Doroon said.

'Don't worry,' Garion said. 'Aunt Pol will fix it.'

And so she did. When the three appeared at the door of her kitchen, she took in the situation with a single glance. 'Bring him over here,' she told them, her voice not even excited. She set the pale and violently trembling boy on a stool near one of the ovens and mixed a tea of several herbs taken from earthenware jars on a high shelf in the back of one of her pantries.

'Drink this,' she instructed Doroon, handing him a steaming mug.

'Will it make my arm well?' Doroon asked, suspiciously eyeing the evil-smelling brew.

'Just drink it,' she ordered, laying out some splints and linen strips.

'Ick! It tastes awful,' Doroon said, making a face.

‘It’s supposed to,’ she told him. ‘Drink it all.’

‘I don’t think I want any more,’ he said.

‘Very well,’ she said. She pushed back the splints and took down a long, very sharp knife from a hook on the wall.

‘What are you going to do with that?’ he demanded shakily.

‘Since you don’t want to take the medicine,’ she said blandly, ‘I guess it’ll have to come off’

‘*Off?*’ Doroon squeaked, his eyes bulging.

‘Probably about right there,’ she said, thoughtfully touching his arm at the elbow with the point of the knife.

Tears coming to his eyes, Doroon gulped down the rest of the liquid and a few minutes later he was nodding, almost drowsing on his stool. He screamed once, though, when Aunt Pol set the broken bone, but after the arm had been wrapped and splinted, he drowsed again. Aunt Pol spoke briefly with the boy’s frightened mother and then had Durnik carry him up to bed.

‘You wouldn’t really have cut off his arm,’ Garion said.

Aunt Pol looked at him, her expression unchanging. ‘Oh?’ she said, and he was no longer sure. ‘I think I’d like to have a word with Mistress Zubrette now,’ she said then.

‘She ran away when Doroon fell out of the tree,’ Garion said.

‘Find her.’

‘She’s hiding,’ Garion protested. ‘She always hides when something goes wrong. I wouldn’t know where to look for her.’

‘Garion,’ Aunt Pol said, ‘I didn’t ask you if you knew where to look. I told you to find her and bring her to me.’

‘What if she won’t come?’ Garion hedged.

‘Garion!’ There was a note of awful finality in Aunt Pol’s tone, and Garion fled.

‘I didn’t have anything to do with it,’ Zubrette lied as soon as Garion led her to Aunt Pol in the kitchen.

‘You,’ Aunt Pol said, pointing at a stool, ‘sit!’

Zubrette sank on to the stool, her mouth open and her eyes wide.

‘You,’ Aunt Pol said to Garion, pointing at the kitchen door, ‘out!’

Garion left hurriedly.

Ten minutes later a sobbing little girl stumbled out of the kitchen. Aunt Pol stood in the doorway looking after her with eyes as hard as ice.

‘Did you thrash her?’ Garion asked hopefully.

Aunt Pol withered him with a glance. ‘Of course not,’ she said. ‘You don’t thrash girls.’

‘I would have,’ Garion said, disappointed. ‘What did you do to her?’

‘Don’t you have anything to do?’ Aunt Pol asked.

‘No,’ Garion said, ‘not really.’ That, of course, was a mistake.

‘Good,’ Aunt Pol said, finding one of his ears. ‘It’s time you started to earn your way. You’ll find some dirty pots in the scullery. I’d like to have them scrubbed.’

‘I don’t know why you’re angry with me,’ Garion objected, squirming. ‘It wasn’t my fault that Doroon went up that tree.’

‘The scullery, Garion,’ she said. ‘Now.’

The rest of that spring and the early part of the summer were quiet. Doroon, of course, could not play until his arm mended, and Zubrette had been so shaken by

whatever it was that Aunt Pol had said to her that she avoided the two other boys. Garion was left with only Rundorig to play with, and Rundorig was not bright enough to be much fun. Because there was really nothing else to do, the boys often went into the fields to watch the hands work and listen to their talk.

As it happened, during that particular summer the men on Faldor's farm were talking about the Battle of Vo Mimbire, the most cataclysmic event in the history of the west. Garion and Rundorig listened, enthralled, as the men unfolded the story of how the hordes of Kal Torak had quite suddenly struck into the west some five hundred years before.

It had all begun in 4865, as men reckoned time in that part of the world, when vast multitudes of Murgos and Nadraks and Thulls had struck down across the mountains of the eastern escarpment into Drasnia, and behind them in endless waves had come the uncountable numbers of the Malloreans.

After Drasnia had been brutally crushed, the Angaraks had turned southward on to the vast grasslands of Algaria and had laid siege to that enormous fortress called the Algarian Stronghold. The siege had lasted for eight years until finally, in disgust, Kal Torak had abandoned it. It was not until he turned his army westwards into Ulgoland that the other kingdoms became aware that the Angarak invasion was directed not only against the Alorns but against all of the west. In the summer of 4875 Kal Torak had come down upon the Arendish plain before the city of Vo Mimbire, and it was there that the combined armies of the west awaited him.

The Sendars who participated in the battle were a part of the force under the leadership of Brand, the Rivan

Warder. That force, consisting of Rivans, Sendars and Asturian Arends, assaulted the Angarak rear after the left had been engaged by Algars, Drasnians and Ulgos; the right by Tolnedrans and Chereks; and the front by the legendary charge of the Mimbrate Arends. For hours the battle had raged until, in the center of the field, Brand had met in a single combat with Kal Torak himself. Upon that duel had hinged the outcome of the battle.

Although twenty generations had passed since that titanic encounter, it was still as fresh in the memory of the Sendarian farmers who worked on Faldor's farm as if it had happened only yesterday. Each blow was described, and each feint and parry. At the final moment, when it seemed that he must inevitably be overthrown, Brand had removed the covering from his shield, and Kal Torak, taken aback by some momentary confusion, had lowered his guard and had been instantly struck down.

For Rundorig, the description of the battle was enough to set his Arendish blood seething. Garion, however, found that certain questions had been left unanswered by the stories.

'Why was Brand's shield covered?' he asked Cralto, one of the older hands.

Cralto shrugged. 'It just was,' he said. 'Everyone I've ever talked with about it agrees on that.'

'Was it a magic shield?' Garion persisted.

'It may have been,' Cralto said, 'but I've never heard anyone say so. All I know is that when Brand uncovered his shield, Kal Torak dropped his own shield, and Brand stabbed his sword into Kal Torak's head – through the eye, or so I am told.'

Garion shook his head stubbornly. 'I don't under-

stand,' he said. 'How would something like that have made Kal Torak afraid?'

'I can't say,' Cralto told him. 'I've never heard anyone explain it.'

Despite his dissatisfaction with the story, Garion quite quickly agreed to Rundorig's rather simple plan to re-enact the duel. After a day or so of posturing and banging at each other with sticks to simulate swords, Garion decided that they needed some equipment to make the game more enjoyable. Two kettles and two large pot lids mysteriously disappeared from Aunt Pol's kitchen; and Garion and Rundorig, now with helmets and shields, repaired to a quiet place to do war upon each other.

It was all going quite splendidly until Rundorig, who was older, taller and stronger, struck Garion a resounding whack on the head with his wooden sword. The rim of the kettle cut into Garion's eyebrow, and the blood began to flow. There was a sudden ringing in Garion's ears, and a kind of boiling exaltation surged up in his veins as he rose to his feet from the ground.

He never knew afterward quite what happened. He had only sketchy memories of shouting defiance at Kal Torak in words which sprang to his lips and which even he did not understand. Rundorig's familiar and somewhat foolish face was no longer the face before him but rather was replaced by something hideously maimed and ugly. In a fury Garion struck at that face again and again with fire seething in his brain.

And then it was over. Poor Rundorig lay at his feet, beaten senseless by the enraged attack. Garion was horrified at what he had done, but at the same time there was the fiery taste of victory in his mouth.

Later, in the kitchen, where all injuries on the farm

were routinely taken, Aunt Pol tended their wounds with only minimal comments about them. Rundorig seemed not to be seriously hurt, though his face had begun to swell and turn purple in several places and he had difficulty focusing his eyes at first. A few cold cloths on his head and one of Aunt Pol's potions quickly restored him.

The cut on Garion's brow, however, required a bit more attention. She had Durnik hold the boy down and then she took needle and thread and sewed up the cut as calmly as she would have repaired a rip in a sleeve, all the while ignoring the howls from her patient. All in all, she seemed much more concerned about the dented kettles and battered pot lids than about the war wounds of the two boys.

When it was over, Garion had a headache and was taken up to bed.

'At least I beat Kal Torak,' he told Aunt Pol somewhat drowsily.

She looked at him sharply. 'Where did you hear about Torak?' she demanded.

'It's *Kal* Torak, Aunt Pol,' Garion explained patiently. 'Answer me.'

'The farmers were telling stories – old Cralto and the others – about Brand and Vo Mimbire and Kal Torak and all the rest. That's what Rundorig and I were playing. I was Brand and he was Kal Torak. I didn't get to uncover my shield, though. Rundorig hit me on the head before we got that far.'

'I want you to listen to me, Garion,' Aunt Pol said, 'and I want you to listen carefully. You are never to speak the name of Torak again.'

'It's *Kal* Torak, Aunt Pol,' Garion explained again, 'not just Torak.'

Then she hit him – which she had never done before. The slap across his mouth surprised him more than it hurt, for she did not hit very hard. ‘You will never speak the name of Torak again. *Never!*’ she said. ‘This is important, Garion. Your safety depends on it. I want your promise.’

‘You don’t have to get so angry about it,’ he said in an injured tone.

‘Promise.’

‘All right, I promise. It was only a game.’

‘A very foolish one,’ Aunt Pol said. ‘You might have killed Rundorig.’

‘What about *me*?’ Garion protested.

‘You were never in any danger,’ she told him. ‘Now go to sleep.’

And as he dozed fitfully, his head light from his injury and the strange, bitter drink his aunt had given him, he seemed to hear her deep, rich voice saying, ‘Garion, my Garion, you’re too young yet.’ And later, rising from deep sleep as a fish toward the silvery surface of the water, he seemed to hear her call, ‘Father, I need you.’ Then he plunged again into a troubled sleep, haunted by a dark figure of a man on a black horse who watched his every movement with a cold animosity and something that hovered very near the edge of fear; and behind that dark figure he had always known to be there but had never overtly acknowledged, even to Aunt Pol, the maimed and ugly face he had briefly seen or imagined in the fight with Rundorig loomed darkly, like the hideous fruit of an unspeakable evil tree.