

Sentinel

by

Rina the Wood Elf has always been told her wheelchair defines her, but can she prove everyone wrong and become a Sentinel?

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

Ext: woodland, day.

High in the branches of an exotic rain forest, all is peaceful. In the background, structures can be seen in the treetops; wooden houses, platforms and suspended walkways that link them. Branches rustle, a bird is startled into flight.

RINA, a young wood elf with pointed features wearing roughspun clothes swings into view. She is moving hand to hand, branch to branch, through the trees towards a wooden platform.

LYRA, another young elf stands waiting for RINA on the platform, she is visibly frustrated.

RINA comes close enough to the platform to drop, catching a wooden bar, and swinging herself from that into a seat. She moves her arms and comes into view; the seat is a wheelchair fashioned from wood.

LYRA

Where have you been? Your Ma's looking for you.

RINA

In the trees, training. I can do it, Ly!

LYRA

You can't! The Elders won't let you! You can't challenge them. You've been given a Role.

RINA

I'm not going to spend my whole life tending fires and stirring the pot, Ly. I can be a Sentinel.

LYRA

The Elders won't approve.

RINA

They *have* to, Ly. When I'm in the trees, it's like I'm flying!

LYRA

They already told you, your chair moves too slowly. If we're attacked, you wouldn't be able to run.

RINA
I don't need to run, Ly, didn't
you hear me? I can fly!

LYRA
Or fall to your death!

RINA
Better that, than die of boredom
in the kitchens.

LYRA
The Elders won't change their
minds.

RINA
They should. I'm Elbar's daughter.

RINA pushes herself determinedly down the walkway, towards
a wooden hut.

LYRA
Ree...

Shaking her head, LYRA follows slowly behind.

RINA reaches the doorway and lets herself inside.

INT: AN ELVEN TREEHOUSE, DAY

There are no internal walls, but curtains give privacy to
some areas. Rickety shelves hold dried herbs and jars of
preserved foods. Sunlight lances through open shutters.
AMRA, an older wood elf, is putting food on the table.

AMRA
(Relieved)
There you are, Rina!

LYRA comes in and takes a seat at the table. She is
preoccupied, conflicted.

RINA
Sorry, Ma. I needed some space to
think.

AMRA
About what?

RINA
The Rite.

AMRA
Again! You'd do better to put that
out of your head-

RINA
Ma-

AMRA
Moping about things you can't
change gets you nowhere.

RINA
Ma!

AMRA
I know you hoped for more, Ree,
but things are how they are. It
does you no good to have your head
in the clouds!

RINA mouths the last words as AMRA says them. When her
mother finishes, RINA slams her hands down on the table.

LYRA
She's been practising.

RINA glares at her friend, giving her a non-verbal 'shut
up'.

AMRA
Practising? What?

LYRA
It scares me to see her out there,
but she can do it.

AMRA
(Icy)
She can do what?

LYRA
Climb.

AMRA glares at both girls, hands on her hips, lips pressed
tight to hold in angry words.

RINA
Ma, I'm strong. I can do it.

AMRA
I forbade it, Ree. You promised
me.

RINA

I'm sorry Ma, I am. I hated keeping it a secret from you, but I had to try.

AMRA

You went behind my back-

RINA

I'm sorry! I just...I just wanted a chance. My whole life people have been telling me what I can't do, protecting me, smothering me. The only time I feel free is when I'm in the trees.

AMRA sinks slowly to a chair, tears in her eyes. She looks from RINA to LYRA who shrugs and nods.

LYRA

My heart almost burst the first time I saw her, but she can do it. She's so strong, Amra.

AMRA wipes her eyes. RINA reaches for her hand.

RINA

Ma, please. I know you worry for me, because I'm not like the others. But that's just it, I'm NOT like the others! I can do things they can't. I'm strong in different ways.

AMRA

Ree...what do you think you can do about it? The Elders have given you a Role, you're for the kitchens. You haven't been invited to the Rite.

RINA

I'm not waiting for an invitation. I'm just going to do it.

AMRA

Just like your father...

RINA

I am, Ma. I am like Da. He was a great warrior, everyone says, and I'm a fighter too!

AMRA
It was fighting that got him
killed, Ree!

RINA
Ma!

AMRA
No, Ree. I forbid it.

RINA lowers her head, tears on her cheeks. She turns her wheelchair away from the table, moving through a curtain to get her privacy. AMRA watches her go with a pained expression.

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

EXT: HIGH IN THE CANOPY, DAY.

A crowd of wood elf families stands on a large wooden platform, looking out into the forest. At the edge of the platform are about a dozen young people, similar ages, male and female, who are shifting nervously. To one side stand three Elders, two women and a man, marked out by elaborate necklaces of flowers and leaves.

RINA and AMRA approach, with LYRA following. They walk to the front of the crowd and stop. RINA is clutching so tightly at the wheels of her chair that her knuckles are white.

ELDER FENO, a male in his 50's with an impressive wreath of vine and flowers at his neck steps forward.

FENO
Today, our chosen perform their
Rite of Passage. We challenge
their courage, their agility,
their heart. We challenge them to
become our best; our Sentinels!

FENO gestures to The Lookout; it is a small round wooden platform around a tree isolated from the others by a significant gap. There is no obvious way to reach it.

FENO (CONT'D)
Who will be the first to take the
challenge?

BANA, a male wood elf, steps forward. He has a belt at his waist that includes a wooden grappling hook and rope.

FENO (CONT'D)
 (Nodding Approval)
 Begin when you are ready.

BANA takes a deep breath, then leaps from the platform to a nearby branch. In a series of breath-taking jumps he moves, landing on branches or burls and using his arms to steady himself. He is impossibly agile, but even so the strain is seen in every muscle. There are no safety lines, the drops are dizzying. The crowd watches anxiously.

Nearing The Lookout, BANA balances himself carefully on a branch, then reaches behind him and takes the grappling hook from his belt. He throws it surely, it winds around a wooden bar, and he swings across to victory.

RINA is watching with tears rolling down her face, but she cheers with the rest of the crowd.

A WOOD ELF next to Amra nudges her.

WOOD ELF
 A shame your girl can't carry on
 Elbar's legacy.

AMRA turns quickly away, she stares at RINA as she gathers control.

FENO
 Who will be the next to take the
 challenge?

AMRA springs into action, grabbing the back of Rina's chair and pushing her forwards.

AMRA
 She will!

There are a few gasps, and one loud laugh that soon cuts short.

FENO
 She can't...

AMRA
 She can. Can't you?

RINA stares at her mother in shock, which slowly fades to joy.

RINA
 I can.

FENO
How can she...
(He gestures to the
chair)

AMRA
Let her show you.

FENO glances to the other Elders, he spreads his palms to ask a question. There is unspoken communication; the other two nod simultaneously.

FENO
She may try.

AMRA squats down beside RINA.

AMRA
I don't know how you're going to
do this, but you wanted a chance.
Well, you've got one.

RINA is too emotional to reply. She nods, squeezes her mother's hand and then wheels herself to the edge of the platform.

There is a murmur of reaction from the crowd, lots of head shaking and worry.

RINA looks out over the course, mentally planning each move. After a few seconds, she begins to wheel herself away from the edge of the platform.

LYRA
Don't give up, Ree!

RINA grins, she was never giving up. She positions herself below a tree. Reaching up, she grabs a branch and pulls herself from her seat. Suspended from the branch, she reaches for another, higher. Using the strength of her arms and upper body, she gains momentum, swinging further and faster; hand over hand, branch to branch.

AMRA and LYRA watch anxiously, holding hands.

The community watches, first in concern and then in admiration.

RINA swings, but her first hand slips on moss and instead of moving forward she must grab the same branch with the other hand, or fall. She hangs, all momentum gone, and too far from another branch to move on. Sweat drips. She breathes heavily and, for a moment, shows self doubt. Grunting, she eases her way into the tree, towards the trunk, where the gaps between branches are narrower.

AMRA

Ree-na. Ree-na. Ree-na.

First LYRA and then the crowd take up the chant.

RINA swings to another branch, then another, rebuilding momentum until she is hanging from the branch where Bana used his grappling hook. But the gap is too far; Rina grimaces and begins to circle the tree. Spiralling outwards from the trunk, each leap is bigger, further.

The crowd is confused, their chant becomes scattered, but AMRA and LYRA redouble their efforts, keeping it constant.

On her third circuit, RINA is at the ends of the branches. She takes the leap of faith, throwing herself across the divide and towards The Lookout. She makes it, just - fingertips make contact with the platform. She slips, then grabs with the other hand, hanging, breathless.

BANA leans down, offering RINA his hand.

RINA shakes her head, yelling out fury and exhaustion as she hauls herself up to the platform. Utterly spent.

The crowd erupts into cheers. The ELDER's nod their approval.

LYRA

She did it! She did it!

AMRA

She did it.

RINA, catching her breath on the platform, finds her mothers gaze and smiles. She raises her hands over her head in victory.

FADE OUT:

THE END