**Excerpt from The Beggar King**

**Chapter 10**

“You there!”

His hand shaking wildly, he placed the yellow flowers at the base of the tree. “Some of us still remember,” he said, then faced the group of black-clad men running towards him. Two of them had drawn their daggers. For some reason he thought of those finches that used to dance upon the treetop.

*Run!* But he just stood there.

And then a different voice, a man’s, said,“The world is merely wallpaper. You’ve known that all along. Hide behind it. Here is your gift. Take it, and save yourself.” Somehow Jordan knew what to do. He pulled at the edge of the tree trunk as if it were a doorway. A great rushing sound around his head made him think of the wings of a thousand birds, and then he stepped out of the world and disappeared.

At first it seemed as if he was simply hiding behind the tree, but he could sense it was more than that. He was hiding behind the air behind the tree. It was dark and musty and his own heavy breathing sounded in his ears. He examined his shadowy surroundings and saw a narrow dirt path. And then one of the shadows moved.

“Greetings,” said a voice Jordan recognized, and he tensed. It was that fellow he’d met earlier. “I have waited such a long time for you. You have accepted my gift, then.”

“This? You did this?”

“Now you have a talent to be reckoned with,” and the old-young man flashed a crooked smile at him.

Pandemonium had erupted in the world Jordan had left behind – Landguards yelling and waving their long black sticks in the air, a crowd of Cirrans talking and pointing with excitement towards the tree – but it all came to him from such a distance. He could see and hear it, yet he was no longer a physical part of it. If the world was only wallpaper, then he had stripped it back to see what the walls of this house were really made of.

“Where’s that boy?” one of the Brinnian guards cried over the cheering and applause.

“You let him get away!” said another.

“Someone better go after him. If the emperor finds out…”

“Shut your mouth. Find the boy.”

“And if we don’t?”

“Find someone. What about that beggar? Arrest him. Where’d he go?”

And the old-young man standing next to Jordan laughed. “See how it is with us? We have the power now. They’ll never catch us, Jordan Elliott. Do you see?”

*Us?* Jordan flinched. “How do you know my name?”

“I know what’s worth knowing.” The man winked at him. “Return to the world at a safer location. Tell no one about the Beggar King,” and he was gone.

Jordan stood very still. *Beggar King?*