

The only thing she seemed able to focus on was the ringing between her ears.

The lithe woman was seated in a rickety cart, her arms bound behind her back with solid rope. At least they had the decency to keep her clothes on, even if they had stripped her of her leather armor. 'And here I thought chivalry was dead,' she said in her head. Another thought soon followed, though it caused the ringing to grow louder for a moment. Once she pushed it back to a manageable level, she tried to reach into the waistband of her pants.

"I wouldn't bother with that, Missy," the man guiding the cart muttered. His voice was rough, as if he spent more time enjoying the wooden pipe than the fresh air. "We made sure to take all your knives." He chuckled as he felt the hot stare of the bound blonde. "Don't worry. We keep a female member with every trope for... such an occasion."

"As if that would bring me any solace," the blonde snapped back, keeping the heated stare planted to the back of the driver's head. After figuring he wouldn't look back, she slumped against the side of the cart. The lack of any insignia on the man showed he wasn't of the law, giving a faint glimmer of hope to the ordeal. "So where is this fine vessel taking me?" she finally asked, the sound of the wooden wheels grinding against dirt and stone finally getting the better of her.

"That be something you shouldn't worry your little head about. You'll be taken good care of." He then let a soft chuckle slip from his lips. "Better than the cut they dressed, I'm sure. Its not everyday that someone uses the flat of their blade for a knock-out."

The blonde tried to reach up to find the wound, only to be reminded that her hands were restrained. Focusing, she was able to feel her hair was slightly matted, and a faint pulse not far above where the ringing in her ears was originating from. Thankfully, her vision wasn't blurred. It did her no good, however, given that the surrounding hills had engulfed the last bits of sunlight.

"You know, its not everyday that a Knight of Cormyr makes their way into the underbrush."

The stern voice was paired to a man of equal stature. He was tall, wide-shouldered. His clothing appeared to strain to contain the muscles underneath. His imposing build almost was deceiving as his black beard and hair was dusted with the gray of seniority. His hazel eyes held a sinister gleam from the torchlight in the cell. He gave off an aura of authority, signified when none of the other six men in the cell spoke after he did.

He was walking around a large beast, it forced down into a kneeling position and stripped bare of naught but fur. If able to stand, the beast would have towered a full foot over all the men in the room. His pelt of earthy brown, growing dark along his back, or fading along his legs and arms. Mixed in were streaks of pink flesh, scars of his past actions; and red blood, reminders to all of the beatings it had received over the recent nights. Chains of iron kept the beast bound to the stone floor, its gaze not even bothering to match that of its captors.

"Its also rare to find scum like yourself wandering our lands," the man resumed. "So the fact that both aspects are bundled into one useless ball of pelt is certainly surprising. Care to explain yourself?" He was holding a hefty whip behind his back with both hands, clutched dutifully. The tip of it casually dragged against the ground, a faint blood trail left in its wake. Too much time passed to the man's liking as the beast remained silent. "Hmph. Didn't you owners teach you to speak when spoken to?"

The beast simply spat at the man's feet, a mixture of saliva and blood landing on the iron cap of his boots. A defiant smirk soon formed on its muzzle, though it quickly faded as that very boot struck square against its stomach. It doubled over in pain and lost breath, gasping loudly, eliciting laughter and taunts from the other men in the room.

“Let the fur ball stay down here for a while longer, men. Maybe he'll talk if we starve him.” The men couldn't help but to chuckle quietly. They had know it had been almost a week since the beast was last fed. As the rest of the men exited the room, their leader moved a water bucket in front of the beast. Then casually nudged it just out of the reach of the chains. “Bloody gnolls,” he muttered out, spitting into the bucket before making his way out of the cell.

The cart creaked to a stop in the middle of a makeshift outpost, the driver handing the reins to a young man. Holding a bag of leather in one hand and various knives in the other, he hopped from his perch before motioning for the woman to make her way off as well. “Last stop. All disembark. Mind your step.”

The woman couldn't help but to roll her eyes, making her way off the cart without his assistance. The ringing had stopped, but that didn't subdue the dull throb from the blow she sustained. She forced the pain aside, knowing she had to learn her surroundings. 'Hard to do when relying on campfires and sparse torches,' she thought, letting her eyes dart between structures.

Tents dotted most of the visible grounds, people milling about or drinking next to fires. Game was being slaughtered, cooking pots were bubbling. But mostly, the lot were focused on several barrels of mead. The majority didn't seem to be fighting fit, so either they were young and dumb, or taken prisoner like herself. And even if the driver was not telling tales, it wouldn't surprise her if she was the only female present.

The number of tents far outnumbered the wooden shacks. Reasoning led to these being the holds for weapons, armor and food. A particularly long one appeared to be set up as a standing bath house. 'Glad to see they at least appreciate hygiene,' she thought. A sniff to the air hinted that they weren't far off from the latrine. Watching a man step from the trees fastening his belt confirmed her theory easily.

The prominent feature, however, was the stone tower. It appeared to have been abandoned and in disrepair until this lot showed up. The tower showed signs of an attack: Several small holes were punched into its sides, the earth around the base looked scorched, and the tower itself no longer stood above the tree line. A crude roof was fastened to the damaged top by the current users, protecting it from the elements while rendering it further useless as a sentry post.

A large group of men were making their way out of its lower level, with two breaking off from them to head for her. Both men were remarkable specimen: Strong of height and build, black hair. One of them wore a thin mustache, while the other opted for a full beard. Both were humans of bronze skin, donned in simple cloth beneath rough leather armor. The mustached one had a broadsword strapped to his right hip, which the bearded man was carrying a whip behind his back.

“What have you got for us tonight, Alexander?” the bearded one asked when in range. Even with the milling of bodies and the slurring of regional drinking songs, his voice managed to cut through as if no one was making a sound at all.

“Your lads over near Corm Orp managed to bag this little lass,” the rotund man said with a laugh, reaching a hand out to try and stroke on the blonde's cheek. He had to quickly pull it away from being bitten. “She's a feisty one, to say the least. Actually killed one and wounded four more. Least until Maxwell clocked her clean.”

The mustached man took this news rather hardly, casually walking over to the woman before slapping her cleanly with the back of his hand. A firm grasp to her chin forced an eye to eye gaze. His face stayed hard, but she only formed a playful grin. “What?” she said, managing a cheerful tone under duress. “The one who died fell onto my dagger. Victim of circumstance.”

“Circumstances that shall come back to rue you, woman.” The bearded man let out a huff of frustration before his gaze returned to Alexander. “She have any personal effects?”

“A few, sir.” He held up the bag and knives, offering it to the mustached man. “Here is her armor, along with the standard adventurer's kit. We think she had a pet cat, but it ran off into the woods during the scuffle. Coin pouch with fifty falcons. She's got a pretty dagger in there as well. Likely enchanted. Couple iron daggers. Were hidden in... interesting spots.”

The two other men scoffed, the mustached man finally taking his hand off of the woman's chin. “I don't like this one at all, Micheal,” he coldly said, taking the items from Alexander and dismissing him. “I just know she's hiding something.”

“We all keep secrets, Robert. You expect any less from a woman?” Micheal stretched for a moment before finally moving forward, giving a small, courteous bow. “As you may guess, I am Micheal. Micheal Allwein, to be more precise. This is my lieutenant and cousin, Robert Allwein. Now, what are your reasons for attacking my men and women on the trail?”

He tried to put on a soft smile, maybe hoping some kindness might be what was ordered. As she continued to stare at the ground, his smile faded. “Come now, dear. You can't just stand here and not entertain my curiosity. Just what are you doing on the edge of Cormyr?”

She continued to look at the ground, her hands forming into fists. She idly kicked at a stone, waiting for the tension to build and his frustration to show. “Si tir ti kiwieg hefoc ukrisir ekess wux.” she finally mumbled. Her voice was low, the words sounding as if they were being formed by grinding a pair of stones together.

Both men were stunned into silence. In fact, anyone within ear shot stopped what they were doing, several tankards thudding against the ground. The way she spoke her words had not been heard by many, and of those who have, thought they would never hear it again. The only noise at first were the horses becoming unsettled, men tugging the reins hard to bring them back into check. All was still until Robert finally chimed in. “I told you she was trouble, cousin. I believe she speaks in the tongue of dragons.”

“Hmph! So be it, then.” He clutched abnormally hard to his whip. He was certainly unsettled by the power of her words. He had to shake off a layer of self doubt before turning to Robert. “Have our medic tend to her wounds. Then toss her into The Pit with the fur ball. Maybe getting scared senseless might get her to talk in Common.”

The gnoll roared loudly as he strained against his binds, the strong iron cutting into his wrists as he desperately clutched towards the bucket. Even if he lead out with his torso, his muzzle just couldn't close the gap. "Mwen pral manje ou!" he yelled in frustration before falling back onto the spot in the middle of the room. He rubbed a hand against the cuffs. The men were smart, he begrudgingly admitted. The group ambushed him, fed him a heavy sedative to keep him quiet, then secured the shackles with thick rivets instead of with a lock.

His back stung with the welts and cuts from the whipping their leader had handed down. He felt ashamed to be sitting in a cell, nude. He had been starved and given little water over the past nights. Using the corner of a room for what few times he needed to relieve himself. He could stand for a hot bath, a gallon of mead and a whole roasted pig. Hell, he could almost kill for those right now.

What he was kicking himself about most was the fact that he went away from his order. They understood that he wanted to better himself, and that most within the order wouldn't be able to keep up with his raw power. So he took time away, keeping his colors on him in case things arose. "Sa te travay anpil," he muttered to himself, just before he heard the key turn to the lock on his cell.

Within moments a lithe blonde was tossed into the far corner, a thick white bandage wrapped around her head. The door was quickly closed and relocked, the fading voices wishing not to be 'cursed by the demon's words.' The gnoll quickly took a pose of dominance, however much the chains would allow him to. The woman seemed unmoved. "Ou pa fè pè?"

The woman slumped to the wall behind her, pushing up against it to wiggle back to standing. With only moonlight filling the cell, she could barely tell what was there. But her ears picked up the tongue, though she knew only a key word from the beast's sentence. "L'gra? Kii jalla si l'gra vi garmth di tsil!"

"Strong words coming from woman!"

"Says the fool who is bolted to the floor!"

They both fell quiet, shooting hard stares at one another. Crickets chirped outside the cells window, and the tension was slowly building to a boiling point. The woman was the first to finally back down, her eyes closing, taking in a deep breath before exhaling. A glance downwards revealed the bucket, moving next to it, then nudging it towards the gnoll with a foot.

The beast wasted little time, grasping the bucket with both hands and bringing it to his mouth. He didn't care what it was tainted with. He had not a drink in almost two nights. The water spilled down his chest, shoulders and stomach, and he dropped the bucket as he almost choked from drinking so quickly.

"Ha! Look at you," the woman started again, not even giving way to the stern, yellow eyed stare the gnoll shot. "Acting like you haven't a meal in a whole day. Behaving like the savage beast you are."

"Seven," the gnoll managed out between coughs, the blonde soon going quiet. "I have been for seven night. And I NOT savage! I bath and groom, unlike others of kind. Trained as noble fighter!"

"Too bad they did not train you in proper Common," she muttered out. She sidestepped upon hearing the gnoll yell, narrowly avoiding the bucket being tossed towards her hips. A glance behind her revealed that it had broken into chunks and splinters due to contact with the stone wall. "Yikes!"

Sensitive much?!”

“What part of seven night you not understand?” The gnoll re-settled into a kneeling pose, hands resting on his lap. He took his turn to recompose himself. He watched as the woman had moved closer again, sitting herself down in front of him. Close enough to reach, if he wanted to. With a strong and confident gaze being returned against his, he decided to re-break the silence. “How you know Abyssal?”

“Hmm. Interesting first question.” The blonde hummed as she recollected on her youth. “Peeked at books at the school I was holed up at. Yes, I was able to withstand their power. But I only learned a few key words.” As she nodded to herself, she finally noticed that his body was bare. “Why are you naked?”

“The only clothing needed is armor. Which they took.” He nods quietly towards the door. “Fur does good job preventing rawness. How captured?”

The blonde sighed at that. “Was ambushed. Near Corm Orp. Killed one, injured four. Think I took the flat side of a broadsword for my troubles.” She tilts her head, as if she wanted to point to the bandages she acquired. “You?”

“Same.” A soft smirk soon formed across his muzzle. “Killed three, hurt seven. Sedatives.”

They both sat in silence again, though it wasn't as awkward as before. They could hear several men conversing outside of the small cell's outdoor window, their bodies blocking the light from the moon. The woman was in mild awe of the red glow the gnoll's eyes were giving, no doubt caused by the supposed demonic blood in his veins. They continued their silence when the men moved away, bringing light back to the space.

“I am Greifer,” the gnoll finally said, his voice cutting the silence with the grace of a new cadet holding a training blade.

“Seraphina Crenshaw,” she returned. “Please, call me Sera.” They sat in quiet again, with a soft smirk soon forming on her face. “So how are we busting out of here?”

Two half-elf males held guard at the end of a hallway, just before the stairway the leads up the tower to the doorway outside. One was leaning against the wall, the other was sitting in a chair across from him. Their thin frames barely filled out the armor they were given, and the man standing was constantly adjusting his set.

“By Selune,” he muttered, finally getting the armor to shift to a spot that was comfortable. “Why are we the ones stuck on guard duty? Its not like the furbag is going to escape those chains.”

“Oh just forget it,” the seated half-elf said, pushing back on his chair until it was propped back against the wall. “Its a simple formality, OK? And you just said so yourself: He's not getting out of those chains. Besides, what's the worse that can happen?”

“GET ME OUT OF HERE!!!” Sera yelled out, her face pressed against the small, sealed, view window. “THIS BASTARD IS TRYING TO EAT ME!”

“Huh. So she does speak Common,” the seated guard said, running a hand up through his hair. “Should we go alert Captain Allwein?”

“Yeah, he did mention that-”

“HE'S ABOUT TO BREAK OUT OF HIS CHAINS!!!”

“Oh gods,” they both muttered out, quickly getting to their feet and running down the hallway to the door. As they grew closer, they could hear the sound of cloth being ripped, the sound of the beast growling and snarling. The one that was seated produced the keys for the cell, pushing them into the lock and turning it hastily. “Ready?”

“You bet,” Sera muttered, sending both men stumbling back as the door was swung open against them. Before they could draw their swords she was quickly against one of the men, her unbound hands wasting little time in landing a disorienting punch. Seamlessly, she led her target to the open cell door, drawing his sword from his side before kicking him into the darkness. A quick turn had her facing the other guard, the short sword pointed towards his neck. “If you don't do exactly as I say, the last thing you'll see'll be your entrails on the ground.”

The half-elf slid across the stone floor of the cell, letting a faint groan slip once he came to a halt. He quickly rolled onto his hands and knees, gasping for air. He had never smelled such a volatile combination of scents: The pungent stench of urine hit hardest, quickly followed by dried blood and heavy earth. Soon cutting through was a mixture of stale breath and wet fur. It was at this point that he dared to look up.

Looming over him was the gnoll. Even with the beast forced low, his form exuded so much power and rage. The eyes glowed fiercely, and the heavy breathing was pushing a scent that could only be matched by the smell produced during the curing of animal hides.

Greifer barely had to emit a growl before the young cadet simply fainted from sensory overload and shock. He chuckled after a few moments before he looked up, not seeing Sera or the second guard. 'If that harlot ran off without me,' he thought after several minutes, but the visions in his head of mauling her were cut off as he watched a second half-elf struggling to carry a large sack.

“OK, here it is!” he shouted out after dropping the bag, still trying to shift his armor into a comfortable position. “Now will you let me go?”

“Right after nap time,” Sera replied, a devious smirk taking residence on the corner of her mouth. She then raised the sword above her head, striking the hilt of it against the back of the man's head, knocking him out. After admiring her handiwork she looked over the blade itself. “Hmm. Not bad. Looks like standard military issue. This wouldn't happen to be yours, would it?”

“Unlikely,” Greifer grumbled out, taking a moment to slide the unconscious guard from in front of him. “Weapons are not garbage. Magical.”

“That makes two of us. Which means that they've stashed them someplace else.” She tosses the sword aside, frisking up the guard next to her. A satisfied sigh emits as she pulls a dagger from his right boot.

“That's more like it. You can use that sword.”

“Ha. You mean toothpick? Rather claws before puny sword.”

“Your funeral. How long will it take you to don your armor?”

“Faster than.... shake of lamb tail?”

Sera paused for a moment, idly flicking her thumb against the edge of the dagger to test its edge. “Well then. I guess your Common is better than I give you credit for. We'll only have that much time between when I melt your chains and when they'll be pouring in.”

Greifer took his turn for pause now. He then raised his arms as high as he could, showing the riveted shackles. “Melt? If mean unlock, I see not how that work.”

“Oh, you silly puppy. Locksmith isn't the only talent I possess.” She was gently tossing the dagger into the air, letting it twirl before catching it by the handle. She did this a few times before magical energy starts to spark from it, a short trail of electrical arching following the handle with each toss. “Close your eyes, take a deep breath, and do your damndest not to flinch.”

The night was starting to wind down from the small festivities. Most of the men had already retired to their bedrolls in an effort to shrug off too much mead. Some were milling about doing menial tasks. Others still were preparing for their round of night watch, knowing that even a band like themselves could be victim of thieves. They'd be easy to spot on this night, however, as the moon was at its fullest and the sky cloudless. The air was starting to flow clean, the scent of fresh air and soot clearing away the aromas of charred meat.

Robert Allwein was giving final instructions to a small band of men before dismissing them, waiting for a gap between to form before he finally sighed. He then started to make his way to his personal tent, pausing just before going in. A small light was flickering from the tent adjacent, a small node of curiosity flicking to life. “I would have expected you to be asleep by now, cousin.”

A small bit of rustling came from within Michael's tent, it quickly being followed by a female soldier stumbling out into the night air. She quickly wiped her lips with her sleeve, gave a hasty salute, then started running back to the main camp. Robert could only laugh, waiting for Michael to cover his shame before entering in his tent. “Trying to boost moral, I see.”

“If only one troop at a time,” Michael returned, offering Robert the stool across from his cot. “But I couldn't sleep. Something seems off about that fur ball we have locked up.”

Robert nodded in agreement, settling onto the stool, unfastening the sword from his hip. “You mean aside from the fact that he's a tamed beast running around in military grade armor and weapons?”

“But of course.” Michael took a moment to run a finger through his beard. “The swords that he wields. Despite the writing on the sheathes being in that unbearable script, they don't possess any kind of demonic powers. That means, thankfully, we could peddle them off in the black market for a hefty cost.”

“Good,” Robert scoffed, leaning back against the tent support. “If we’re going to make any kind of headway towards Eagle Peak, we’re going to need all the lions we can get our hands on.” He grasped to his sword again, idly inspecting it, testing the draw. “And what about the girl?”

Michael's expression soon grew perplexed. “What about her?”

“Well, she is a woman...”

“Robert, I don't appreciate where this idea is going.”

“Well then why don't you explain what that soldier was doing in here?” Once the silence filled the tent, Robert felt a defiant smile form. “Exactly. This camp is full of men with needs, and we need every body to be fighting fit.” He stood to his feet, putting his sword back onto his hip. “Of course, I don't intend to simply throw her to the wolves. She'll likely get killed. Not everyone in the militia is... stable.”

Michael pushed himself upright, standing between his cousin and the opening to the tent, preventing the younger and marginally smaller of the two from leaving. Michael placed a hand onto Robert'sd shoulder, giving it an assuring squeeze. “Robert... While I still think that is wrong and very ungentlemanly of you, I do have to agree. But there is a time and place for everything.”

A moment afterward, a loud crackling noise could be heard, followed by the sound of several men shouting. Both leaders quickly scrambled out of the tent, Michael grasping to his whip that was hanging on the support. “By Tempus, what was that?”

The camp was engulfed in hysteria. Men and women alike were scrambling about: Gathering weapons, alerting fellow men at arms, checking on women and children. A small number had gathered at the outside of the broken tower, weapons drawn, trying to decide who would get the short straw of going in first.

Robert just beat Michael to the group gathering, having already drawn his broadsword from its sheathe. “Report! The blazes is going on here?!”

“We haven't figured that out ourselves yet, sir!” The voice from a half-orc boomed over the sound of the chaos, the form clutching hard to a pike. “The two guards below haven't emerged. But I'm to suspect magic, sir!”

“Bloody hell,” Michael blurted out.

“And you doubted my suspicions on the woman, cousin,” Robert retorted.

“You know, now isn't the time for your wit, Robert.”

Before Robert could add more of his form of humor to the situation, a soft meowing sound emitted from the depths of the tower. A small calico kitten soon emerged from the entrances, taking a moment to look around and purr.

“Is that...? That is a cat,” one of the troops muttered. He stepped forward, kneeling down to try and coax it forward. “Come on, little guy. Its not safe down there.”

Robert was about to step forward to reprimand his soldier before a thought crossed his mind. "Michael? Didn't Alexander speak of the woman having a pet cat?"

Michael gave a nod, looking to the troop that now had the small feline in his grasp. It was about this time that it started to glow a faint white. "Drop it!"

Before the men could react, all of their vision was consumed in a bright, white light.

Robert's vision was the first to recover, and all he could see was more chaos starting to unfold in front of him. The gnoll had emerged first from the depths of the tower, wearing armor made of chainmail and various colored strips of leather. It was moving with a sense of speed that something its size shouldn't have. He was brushing aside pikes with ease, leaving deep gashes into troops with one its claws. He didn't seem phased by most of the attacks being performed, even the ones that landed.

As he sidestepped an ally that was flung back by the beast, he was able to see the blond had taken the rear flank of the gnoll. She had donned her leather armor, and was parrying advancing reinforcements with a similar ease of the monster. Quick slashes and cuts from her dagger disabled most. Those who tried to stand back from the onslaught the duo were struck down by blasts of lightning.

In the flurry, Sera turned, managing to catch Robert's gaze in hers. Without even a second thought she pointed her dagger at the man, shooting forth another bolt of magical electricity. It almost hit home, if not for the fact that a body flew in from Robert's right, intersecting the bolt. A glance in that direction revealed Greifer being mobbed, tossing foes in every which direction, dragging them about if they dared to impede him. She released a yell of frustration, opting to just run through the mob and defeat her captor by hand.

Greifer had just gotten the last of the new wave of enemies from his form, holding a female by the nape of her neck. A sharp crack was felt against that arm, causing him to drop the woman, watching her scamper away. "You wish a challenge, Kapon?" he growled out, slouching back forward into his ready position after turning to face Michael. "Ann goumen ti soufri!"

Michael could not understand what the beast had said, his ears burning from the demonic words. The fervor of the battle around him had diminished, the men and women left standing starting to reform ranks behind Michael. He knew from Greifer's posture that it was looking for a fight. And a fight he would give him. He began to stride forward, snapping his whip at the beast's face.

Greifer held his ground, watching the man's movements, plotting. Taking a blind prediction he stepped forward, raising his left arm to block the whip. He guessed right, the length of corded leather wrapping around his forearm. He quickly snatched the whip with his hand, yanking hard to suddenly pull Michael into close range. His next step forward handed his right knee into Michael's stomach, almost knocking the wind out of him, before following by grasping around his neck. The gnoll squeezed harder and harder, slowly lifting the man from the ground. "One chance, human," he snarled out, watching out the corner of his eye, seeing if any of the others tried to step forward.

Michael was still baffled by the amount of stamina and energy the gnoll had, most evident as he felt his windpipe being slowly crushed in his single-handed grip. One of his hands was clutching the offender's wrist, the other trying to reach for the dagger he hid in his boot. "You think..." he gasped out, his fingertips just touching the pommel of his hidden blade. "You think... I would concede... To a

mongrel?!” He smirked widely, just about to pull the dagger from his boot, but it faded as he felt the beast's claws pierce through the skin of his throat.

Sera was running through the few attacks that were being directed to her, as most didn't want to go against someone who was capable of bringing storms from her fingertips. 'The second I find him,' she thought to herself, only just managing to see the glint of a sword emerge from behind a tent. She had succeeded her dodge, hearing the metal whizz just above her head, taking several locks of her hair with it. She quickly found herself on the defensive, having to parry the sword strikes she simply could not avoid.

“I will personally assure that your death will be painful!” Robert yelled between swings, slowly edging Sera backwards towards a campfire. She felt the heat of the flames against her skin. She knew a lightning blast should send him reeling, but the speed of his assault didn't give her the time to muster the mana. A glance back revealed her right against the edge of the pit, and at that moment she had a stroke of genius.

Sera barely managed to sidestep a lunge targeting her stomach, going down to a kneel using her own momentum. She took hold of a log just on the edge, taking a wild swing, striking Robert on his dominant wrist. Embers and ash flew from the strike, the man forced to drop his sword, stumbling backwards as he clutched to his burned hand. With her opening realized, Sera scampered to her feet, closing the formed gap, thrusting forward with her dagger. She gasped loudly, initially from her strike only clipping the top of his shoulder, then from Robert's leg making sound contact to her chest, knocking all the air out of her lungs, along with eliciting a few pops. She was halted instantly, giving Robert the time to strike with his fist against the back of Sera's head.

Sera collapsed to the ground, barely able to breathe, her world fading to black. She was kicked onto her back, looking up to Robert, having already reacquired his sword. His lips were moving, but she couldn't hear his words. 'Is this the day I die?' she thought, watching him raise his sword. A black form suddenly arrived, knocking the man over. It reached a hand down to clutch at her armor, the sudden jerk upwards sending her mind into darkness.

Robert groaned for a moment, rubbing his head, his body having been sent careening into a tent. He shook out the fog, quickly surveying the scene. The blonde was gone, along with whatever it was that broadsided him. A couple of the tents had been set on fire from the embers of her desperation attack, and a few good men were working on putting them out. He forced himself to his feet, watching a small tangent of men run towards him.

“Get these fires out, men,” Robert yelled out, dusting the dirt off his body and gathering his broadsword. “The girl got scooped up by something! I want to know what it was.”

“It was the beast, sir,” one of the troops rang out. “It dashed over here after...”

“After what!” Robert harshly blurted, sensing the apprehension in the man's voice.

“After... After he killed the Captain!”

Robert's heart sank after hearing those words, his brain trying to comprehend the death of his cousin.

His sorrow quickly, painfully turned the rage, Robert charging past the tangent. He sprinted to the circle of troops still near the tower, having gathered around Michael's defeated body. Robert slowed, then stopped, seeing that Michael's throat had been forcibly removed, his hand clutching hard to a dagger.

“Captain?” One man finally dared to say, bringing Robert back from his haze. “What should we do, Captain?”

Robert huffed loudly, his hand clutching hard to the longsword, the leather on the handle groaning. “We bury our dead. In the morning, we hold a ceremony. Then we pack up camp. From there, we hunt.”

“What for, sir?”

“The beast and the harlot. I want her alive, and I'm turning that monster into a rug.”