

Dawn of the Werewolf

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Warm stones echoed with the resonance of frolic and delight as the drunken undulations of bagpipe melodies entice a bacchanalian atmosphere to the cadence of playful drums and arousing flutes, producing a collective symphony inside the castle's confines that would warm hearts and thrill souls with their succulent promises of pleasuring gratification.

It is the dawn of autumn and a lavish feast takes place at the castle of Szapolyai where nobles from all around the kingdom's realm have been drawn to this beacon of carousing light and sodden ballads like lost vessels in the dark and dreary Transylvanian night. Torches flickered outside the castle, outlining a luminous path to its courtyard whence one may enter one of the numerous halls rich in the bitter yet bewitching scents of wine, the abundant sight of a varied assortment of food from the most extravagant meat to the juiciest fruits, and the fornicated strings of lyres aroused by the meticulous hands of troubadours, merry rams and satyrs inebriated in upbeat gaiety manifested by their sweetly resonant songs.

The throne room was graced by waves and waves of crowds dancing to such melodies where desiring wolves charmed maidens of feline elegances in delightful waltzes, only to occasionally retreat to one of the various tables where they could confound either in the trivialities of socialization, or the warm tastes of the various food their wet appetites long waited to indulge in.

All this happened under the delectated eyes of Count Sigismund Szapolyai, a white wolf perching over his royal throne that sat eminently in the middle of his hall, while his piercing blue eyes watched happily over the unfolding merriment. On his right side stood his wife, Anna Szapolyai, veiled in a motherly lupine countenance through which glimmered warm green eyes like beacons of emerald light shining brilliantly through the darkness of her black fur. On his left, though, stood his trusted marshal Frederick, an eagle whose dynasty hailed from the northern realms of cloud carving mountains long ago in times now known only to the fairy tales of yore.

Count Szapolyai felt content knowing that his patrons enjoy the feast he organized. After all, he felt the need to commemorate the latest victories of the realm against the ravaging heathen hordes from the south. War had always took its toll upon a population either through esurient taxes eager to scrape off even the last flesh on someone's bones if that could have amounted to an extra coin, or the worst, through the death of the loved ones forever forgotten on far-off battlefields in places unfathomable. This feast was a means to him to win the sympathy of his vassals so that the desperation of war will not drive them into revolting against him. After all, he has a beloved wife and two beautiful children that will once carry on his dynasty, and the least of his wishes would be to put their frail lives into jeopardy.

Suddenly, Count Szapolyai's piercing eyes were captivated by a certain personage making his entrance into his hall, with steps rushing nervously, completely oblivious to the harmony of all the other feet entangling together in various dances. This silhouette of an orange cat approached the count, delivering a respectful bow. With his liege's permission, he approached him, whispering inconceivable words that completely transformed the count's expression into a horrified face bearing frozen, widened eyes. His white fur spurred as nervousness gripped him, and with a tendering stroke over his wife's maternal arms, he left under the guidance of his servant, summoning his marshal after him.

Following the illuminated trail of torches under the midnight's guise, the three individuals ascended on the castle walls, whence, during daylight, they could gaze into the grandiose beauty of the count's demesne bearing forested hills and shy rivers traversing picturesque villages beyond which a small town erected in the far distance at the bottom of a mountain signaling the borders of his beloved county.

Now however, Szapolyai could notice only a harrowing and impenetrable darkness underneath the waning moon, known to hide ghastly creatures that only the deepest crevices of one's deluded imagination could fathom. Frustrated, the count turned towards the servant that had summoned him so urgently, but the servant then dragged his liege after him towards one of the towers, and from there, he had pointed Szapolyai towards one of the villages perching over the straits of a river, closest to the river.

And there, there the count could finally see...

And what he had seen was the vivid visage of a hellish manifestation as infernal flames rose like an echelon of carnelian poltergeists into the nightly sky. Despite the harrowing darkness that surrounded them, Szapolyai immediately recognized the place where these ominous flames erected from: it was the village of Arsita, whose shy houses now wholly succumbed to the gashing jaws of this inferno.

"Ready the horsemen, Frederick." Szapolyai said as in his eyes were reflected the devouring flames. A livid expression carved his face as his white fur spurred by anxiousness. "I want to know what is happening there."

In a few minutes, dust rose above the road in this darkened diorama as the count's cavalcade stormed from his castle towards the village, all while his guests continued to indulge obliviously in the feast he had organized.

With torches lighting the path down the hill and a tenebrous forest watched only by a decrepit moon, the horsemen rode swiftly to the village, led on by their count himself and his trusted marshal. It did not take long before they reached the village's outskirts whence their eyes widened before the buildings engulfed by flames, and horrified crowds running desperately towards the count's horsemen, shouting of sights of devilry and of other inconceivable things.

The white wolf stopped a few of them, questioning them of this unexpected happening. Their retorts were clad in fear and delirium, alluding towards unclean doings and ghastly apparitions that turned the villagers mad and frenzied. It was not long before the horses

themselves turned nervous forcing their masters to tighten the reins. A presence unnoticeable by their horsemen tainted the atmosphere, one that frightened these loyal beasts of burden.

“Gather whoever you can and tend to the flames.” Szapolyai ordered the villagers he encountered.

“But, milord, it’s Hell out there!” One of them spoke.

“By God, peasant, I’ll be damned if I’ll let you abandon your homes and your families like this!” The count shouted. “Do as I said, and gather anyone you can to join you. We will deal with whatever devilry is here.”

And the two disconcerted conglomerations parted ways. The villagers, accompanied by a few of the count’s horsemen rushed to the wells to save whatever they could from the ravaging waves of charring heat. The count, however, with his retinue, rode down the dirt road into the village center where he noticed how the scenery changed suddenly from a dreary midnight canvas reigned by the perpetual dark into an infernal visage that whispered of a fiery Gehenna, as flames incited symphonies of suffering, the wailing screams of terror and dismay concealed by the searing walls of heat.

A church stood somberly in the center of the village, untouched by the flames as its cold stone evoked an awe-inspiring allure as if it hid wicked shadows beyond its corners. As the cavalcade moved forth, cautiously and heart-struck by the shrieking screams, the shadows leaped forth, and in a daze of horror, the count’s horse lifted itself, plunging the white wolf aloof into the ground. A cacophonous melody of cold steel diving into flesh evoked as the count struggled to find equilibrium, and once his eyes could focus once more upon his surroundings, he was staggered to notice a pile of dead villagers now sent to fatten the ground and the crows by the arms of his retinue.

An unfathomable madness turned the villagers upon one another, where crowds of folks pounced on their innocent kin like rabid dogs and possessed cats, as if they have been subject to a bizarre witchcraft or some other pagan ritual.

Eventually, the streets would flood with rows of desperate villagers running towards the count and his cavalry in search of salvation as they were chased by their very kinsmen as if they were possessed by demonic forces spelled from the deepest realms of the forgotten nether. The horsemen rushed into their aid, impaling the bodies of the maddened with their spears, gutting them with their axes, their swords, the sound of metal was muffled by the softness of flesh and the gurgling growls and hisses evoked from the foamy mouths of those drowned in this bewitching delirium as their eyes suggested a bleak emptiness, devoid of any reasoning whatsoever.

A knot formed at the back of the count’s throat. Out of all the places in this world, this unexplainable disaster beset right upon his realm, in a time where he struggles for peace. Now, he is forced to kill those he once sworn to protect as it was obvious that whatever ounce of civilization once adorned their souls was now no more, as these village folks were all

reduced to nothing but savage beasts vying to sink their claws and foamy fangs into the flesh of the innocents.

An hour passed under the dread of this gloomy night, and the village's roads drenched in scarlet rivers and a malodorous mud mixed with the blood and guts of the deceased. Szapolyai stared from the heart of the village: A mere handful of souls, beyond his own soldiers, survived the carnage. His eyes gazed into the sky above, where a once white and wailing moon now suddenly turned red, as if it was bleeding into an ominous trail like a spin-weaver's thread. He could not help but feel this to be the sighting of a portent of doom, foretelling an ominous event that shadows what has happened here.

A shouting woke him from his meditation: One of his own men, riding from the depths of the village's charred entrails. He spoke of a sickly manifestation in the village outskirts, like a being from the hallowed depths of the world where light is eternally smothered and angels writhe twisted inside out.

Without hesitation, the count rode there. Whatever it was, it was certain to have authored this disaster here, and Szapolyai was adamant to put an end to it.

He reached the village outskirts, where a deafening silence reigned above the unsettling blackness. Szapolyai was accompanied by his horsemen, yet the darkness and the unsettling silence that possessed them all made him feel alone and desolate. He wandered through the tall-grassy plains, into the forest, and there he saw it: the apparition, the demon, one whose silhouette defied the light of one's eyes.

The count's eyes fell upon this wretched figure outlining the abhorrent countenance of an abomination, a demoniacal fiend resembling a black cow with eyes as red and wicked as ponds of rotten blood. And when both of their eyes had intersected, for a mere second, the count could feel a spine-shredding chill surge through his body. He fell off his horse, and as he stared emptily into the night canvas above him, his mind drowned into the seamless seas of the void.

And from there, darkness ensued.