

Flame.

It pours like water over stone from the maw of the beast.

Sears the flesh from bone and leaves nothing but ash.

I saw it.

A great beast.

Terrible and dark.

Like moonless night.

Wreathed in hellfire.

A shadow to blot out the sun.

It came upon our company.

Mere children in the grand scheme of it all.

We thought ourselves warriors.

But they died as cowards.

Screaming in terror.

Begging to an uncaring and absent God to spare them.

The darkness lightened to ash.

Ash that fell like snowfall.

Gentle.

The calm after the storm.

I stood in the middle of it all, surrounded by those that had been my companions.

Blood dripped down my face and ash to stuck to my skin.

It was like a dream.

So quiet and surreal.

And then it came again.

The ash fled from it as we had, fluttering in the heated air.

Up and away as it landed only feet from me.

My sword, held numbly in my hand.

I should seek revenge.

I should seek to spill it's blood, like boiling lava, unto the ground.

But all I could do... was stare.

Stare as it changed.

The darkness condensed, smaller, sucking in the light around it and lengthening until...

A woman.

A woman stood before me.

More regal and proud than any human Queen could hope to be.

With hair like midnight and flawless, chestnut skin.

Her golden eyes stood out like a beacon.

And I fell.

Fell to the fire of her eyes like my comrades to her flame.

What strange, cruel magic.

That should pierce my heart like a blade.

She raised a slender hand, tipped with elegant and dangerous claws, and beckoned to me.

And like a moth to her flame.

I went.

My sword fell, its landing softened by the ash, a soft thud that echoed somehow in my ears.

A warning.

A sign that I was as lost as the dead men.

And still...

I went.

She touched my face.

Dark skin radiating with her heat, dangerous, deadly

And utterly enthralling.

She removed my helmet and stroked my hair.

Her voice was like a bell.

Deep and tolling

And beautiful.

I wept at the sound of it.

Her lips touched the wound on my forehead

A gentle caress that made my heart ache with a ferocity I had never before known.

"Take me with you."

I begged her.

"Take me with you."

She smiled with full, dark lips

And answered.

"No."

And in that moment

I may have died.

For never again will I know such beauty

Such ferocity.

Such cold, unforgiving power.

She did not kill me with fire or fang.

But with a simple word.

"No."