

Chapter 17

The Great Goblin Chief.

Lana stood frozen in fright as the creature emerged. The visions she'd seen before in Serena's seeing pool had done nothing to prepare her for this! Surely there wasn't enough evil in all the world for this thing!

Yet in defiance of her wishes the creature stood there, its eyes, the color of red coals, looked hatefully at the Brissons and their friends who stood against it. Somewhere in the distance the cock crowed again, stubbornly heralding the dawn, and the demon took notice.

Stretching forth its hand, as if reaching for the sun, it spoke in a hideous language of no words, or sounds, or anything that Lana could hear. Yet from its outstretched palm came a black miasma, twisted and black. It billowed into the sky, blotting out the morning light in seconds.

Voices cried out in terror of this new evil, the words mixed and jumbled in the tongues of men and Brissons, while the goblins laughed and jeered with delight.

A goblin rose in front of Lana, she swung her sword and its head bounced away into the smoke. She couldn't see her friends anymore. Did she stand alone? Was she the last now?

"Mama! Papa!" she cried out.

Papa's dead, silly girl! Both of them are! A voice scolded her.

"Help me!" she whimpered. "Help me!" she whimpered. "Mausi, where are you?"

It seemed to her that she could hear her sister's voice, somewhere in the smoke beside her.

She started running towards it, her breathing harsh and ragged in her ears.

A shadowy form appeared in the smoke ahead of her. She slowed; it resolved into a goblin. She cut him down with her sword and kept moving.

She had to get to Mausi, her mind chanted. She leapt over the fallen, passed behind the humans or around her friends as she raced to find her sister.

Where is she? Where is she? Her mind screamed at her over and over.

Her heart felt like it would burst, it hammered so hard in her chest. Would she be too late? Would she only find her sister's corpse? Or would she never find her, but die alone and forgotten on the battlefield.

The Lady was wrong: she realized. There is nothing special about me, nothing at all. The prophecy must have been talking about someone else.

The light from her sword flickered, as if in response to her doubt, but she could do nothing about it now. She had to try

and find her sister.

Suddenly she burst into a pocket of clean air, as if she'd stepped inside the froth bubbles of the stream, and beheld a sight she never forgot even unto her dying day.

The Demon stood tall above the fallen bodies of the humans and Brissons that had stood against it, their corpses scattered and smoking. Only three still fought against the terror, and in the flash of crystal clarity, she knew *who* the smallest one that fought with such skill was. Flaming cuts crisscrossed the beast as it whaled about with its fiery club. A near miss made the three stumble, and the creature laughed as it swung the club back quickly.

Lana watched in horror as her sister went flying from the glancing blow, her form tumbling through the air to land in a spray of dirt in the grass. Her eyes desperately probed for any sign of movement, but she lay perfectly still.

"NOOOOOO!" the howl that tore from her rose above the din in a piercing cry that all heard.

The demon turned in surprise and saw Lana standing there with the sword in her hand.

"The Fox!" his voice took on a note of concern and he actually stepped back, glancing behind him as if to measure the distance to the tunnels.

Lana barely noticed at first, her sole concern remained with the unmoving body lying brokenly in the grass.

She's dead. She's dead. I failed her.

Those thoughts were the only ones running through her mind.

Her despair ignited into a furnace of hate and rage. The sword blazed in her hand, promising vengeance.

The demon looked unsure, his fire beginning to gutter as he stared down at this tiny thing that had haunted his dreams for so long.

Abruptly his demeanor changed, the red fires sprang back and he charged forward.

"You will die!" he promised as he crossed the distance to her.

"Mek'lenek' ta foktek!" Lana cursed him in a language that had no English equivalents.

She charged him in turn, her sword streaking to meet his downward thrust with a shower of sparks that shot into the night sky, the force hurling outwards in all direction and driving the smoke away from them.

The demon looked shocked; that blow should have been powerful enough to completely crush the little bug at his feet.

Lana sensed the hesitation and heaved, the sword flashed and the club burst into molten fragments.

"Raaah!" The demon shouted in rage. Abruptly his hand shot out and his shadow flowed down his arms like water. They formed into a black sword, murdering the light around them.

The sword swished down but *Wolf's Fang* met it and stopped

the demon blade cold.

"What is that thing?" The demon cried in frustration as Lana met each of his strokes with her own.

"Vengeance." Lana hissed back at him.

He pushed her back over the bodies of the slain and down the embankment until they stood amongst the wreck and ruin of the outer circle of tents. Lana could dimly hear the screams from the children inside or the desperate cries of the old men and women as they sought to grasp the glory that had long slipped through their fingers with youth.

The goblins jeered, the flames grew tall, and the sword dimmed in her hand.

The demon sensed its advantage, its face splitting into a fanged grin of excitement. Its moves grew desultory, mocking, as it spoke again.

"Little fool! Your people have all perished from the world, now your new family does as well. Why do you still fight the inevitable? Come, give up now and I will make your death quick. If not..." his grin widened. "You shall be given to my most trusted servants and abused over and over until your mind is gone and you are an empty shell."

Lana's sword-arm grew heavy, it seemed impossible to meet any stroke that the demon could give out. Her future seemed certain, and a quick death would be far preferable to the other ate he promised if she continued to resist, so why bother? She could at least see her family again, and Mause!

Light blazed behind her, shredding the smoke like a flame to paper. Goblins shrieked in terror and the demon hunkered down, shielding its eyes from the glare.

"Foul thing!" Thundered a voice. Lana whipped around to behold Serena; her armor shone unmarred, her spearhead gleamed with delight, and her gaze was filled with fury.

"Foul thing!" she repeated. "You have no place here demon! If you will not face her fairly, then you will face me!"

She advanced and the demon retreated, seemingly on the verge of fleeing back into the tunnels.

The thought of the creature who'd haunted her dreams and hurt her families from afar escaping was too much for Lana.

"No, you won't escape!" she hissed between her teeth.

Getting to her feet she gripped the sword tight, its light coming back.

Without thinking about it, she charged towards the distracted demon, not caring as the heat from its body reached her.

She drew near the beast, its head starting to turn in her direction as it realized the new threat.

Drawing back the sword, Lana hurled it with all her might at her foe.

A shining bar of light gave the sword's movements as all eyes tracked it from Lana's hand to its burying itself into the

demon's chest.

The demon looked down in disbelief; the blade wasn't big enough to have pierced its hide, and it was a demon of the ancient world, one of the few who had managed to destroy Men when they roamed and used weapons of fire.

Its face contorted in fear, then rage as its chest cooled and hardened, the power of the sword working quickly.

"NOOOOOO!" he gave a long, drawn out cry, and then toppled to the earth and lay still.

The goblins, seeing this, broke and ran immediately, harassed by the survivors and menaced by Jake in the sky.

Lana stared at the fallen body of the Demon, now shrinking and disappearing before her very eyes, when she felt a cool hand touch her shoulder.

Jumping in surprise, she saw Serena standing there with a smile on her face. She was saying something but all Lana could notice was how her face seemed to dim before her eyes. She was barely aware of the sensation of someone catching her as she fell before night swooped down upon her.

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