

# Thorns and Iron

Kaelith would slowly and groggily rise to his feet, or he would have if they weren't bound to the floor by cumbersome iron chains. He struggles momentarily to pull away before realizing there were eyes upon him from all sides, they all gawked at him as his eyes met theirs they looked offended that he would even look in their direction. All at once the sound came to him, The low rumble almost crushing him.

He only caught individual words but he could tell it was overwhelmingly insults being slung his way. "Walking mantlepiece" "abomination" and "demon plowing scum" were the first few insults to assault his ears. His long pointed ears flicked yet he didn't flinch, they were only words after all. Ill-informed ones at best, he did indeed have horns. Though they were not the result of "ploughing a demon" they were if anything a gift amongst his people, though he didn't expect his captors to know that. He almost didn't expect them to know what he was, he focused again on his surroundings.

He remembered being at his usual prowling grounds when he had spotted movement in the tall grass between some brush which he found odd, as his people rarely came out that far unless he was following someone. Which meant either he had stumbled across a hunting party he could join. Or he had directly found more fitting prey than the buck he had been tracking, the shape though he saw it briefly was too large to be any small game, yet too lanky and nearly upright to be anything usually found in his forest home. He crept closer, staying low hoping he hadn't been spotted yet. He came upon where he believed the vaguely humanoid shape had gone, before leaping up and over the patch of brush with bow in hand vaulting overhead facing down head first and upon meeting the gaze of his prey he saw what appeared to be a young human man clutching a dagger in hand against his chest with a dark trail of blood running from his nose as well as his mouth.

Kaelith would keep his arrow trained on the man before lowering his weapon and searching the man he was intrigued. Why was a human out this far from home bleeding profusely as well as sneaking about, who was he running from? And why? He decided to check the unconscious man's pockets not finding anything save for a few coins which held no value to Kaelith he then saw, pressed against the dagger was a very valuable looking ring that caught the eye. It seemed odd, the man was wearing a cloak as if trying to conceal his presence, but from whom? As these thoughts crossed Kaelith's mind so too did a small glint of light in the dark of the night, as Kaelith turned to face the motion he was met with the sight of a musket barrel pointed in his face.

He quickly sprung into action swatting the barrel away surprising the man who discharged a round before pulling the gleaming blade he had spotted earlier, Kaelith would have already loosed two arrows into the man's chest before the sword was even halfway from it's sheathe. Kaelith was no fool, He knew that where there was one there were more. He looked a bit further out focusing into the grass spotting the white stripes on the blue uniform of the soldiers out a bit further he loosed a volley dropping two more of them, satisfied that he had fended them off he turned to the young man laying

behind him who was now unconscious. Though as he turned he would faintly see motion from the corner of his vision before everything went black with a heavy thud.

As Kaelith managed to bring the memories to the forefront of his mind he then noticed he was moving. He was in a cart lined with iron bars much like a traveling cell. He noticed there were four soldiers similar to the ones he disposed of earlier sitting outside of the cage along the edges of the cart. After which he noticed he was looking out at walls made of stone bricks, he noticed that none of his kin were captured as well. He grimaced, he may not be noticed for some time. By that point he could be long expired, he looked at his shackles. He may be able to break them, though he would probably be shot immediately. He sat against the iron bars thinking about where they planned on taking him. Had he earned an execution? Or did they intend to use him for information? A thought then occurred to him. The human they were after did not seem to be present, then again he may have joined the other soldiers from before as Kaelith looked at the next cart in the chain which seemed to house bodies, though it was covered. And there were many more than the ones Kaelith felled that night. What had happened? He had the urge to speak but knew what he would be met with.

He sighed before suddenly one of the guards on his cart shouted "Wait! Stop!" before pointing toward a sewer grate which seemed odd to Kaelith, though a moment later the same guard's helm burst open through the back spattering Kaelith with his blood, before the caravan stopped in its tracks as suddenly bolts flew from every direction turning the other guards into pin cushions, in moments the crowd which was waiting for the elven execution began to scatter and flee as screams echoed through the city streets, before a handful of figures emerged from not only the sewer grates but the towers nearby as well before they began searching the cart of bodies paying no mind to Kaelith.

He rose to his feet attempting to break the iron binds, he pulled and strained against them once but had no luck. Again he tried but was met with the creaking of iron but not the snapping sound that meant his freedom, though he would notice the hooded figures who had massacred the guards were now looking at him, they trained their crossbows on him before he turned toward them and waited. He sat motionless for a moment waiting to be returned to the dirt. He wondered if he would feel death approaching, or if he would just awaken in another life. His thoughts were interrupted by a commanding shout "Stand down! Don't kill the elf!" To Kaelith's surprise he opened his eyes and they had lowered their weapons. He struggled to break the iron bindings, this time they groaned and soon after buckled as he grabbed hold of his wrists wringing his hands around them as he looked to the one who had spared him. He was older, grizzled looking, commanding some respect on appearance alone.

The man had one scarred eye with a cataract spreading a milky white through his eye. He was indeed human like the others, he was balding and had a short beard running under his jaw, he stood tall for a human. Not quite as tall as Kaelith. But Kaelith was taller than most in his species as well, the man would laugh softly "Don't worry we're no friends of the throne. We're sure you aren't friends either" he says looking at the cart. The man would assist the others sifting through the mangled remains of possibly their comrades, Kaelith would stand there for a moment in confusion.

"So what happened? All I remember is finding one of your nestlings out in my forest, a young one at that. Next thing I knew, I was loosing arrows into some nestling urchins who had the gall to walk

our borders. I took a blow to the head, and here I am. The boy is nowhere to be found. And my captors, slain by their own kin.” He would narrow his eyes at the man in front of him who would share the serious exchange for a moment before laughing as if not taking the elf seriously. ‘Boy you elven bucks are all the same. Think you’re going to demand what you want from us and we’ll just give it out of what? Fear? Reverence? Pfft, well, you may not have noticed but it seems you aren’t in much of a position to threaten me, boy! Seeing as uh, you’re unarmed and all. Name is Ulrich, not that you asked” He would pause for a moment before the seriousness returned to his demeanor “Though that boy you mentioned, what did he look like?”

The man would seem suddenly to be open to dialogue with the elf as if he just realized some possible importance of this information and at this Kaelith’s expression would bend into a confident one. “Ah! So you need to find the nestling then? Maybe I’ll assist you if my weapons are returned.” He smirks, waiting for a reply. The old human runs his hand over his scalp thinking for a moment before nodding to two of his band who then proceed to search the cart as well as the peppered guardsmen finding the only weapons appearing to belong to an Ulthuri Thorn strider. The bow would be incredibly flexible despite being incredibly durable, and it would have what looked to be live ivy wrapping around it as though the weapon itself was alive. The blades were a bit different by human standards, they were large blades almost perfectly fitted to Kaelith’s arms. Meant to be wielded against the forearm with the blades facing outward, most humans had never seen these used in combat and lived to tell about it.

Though it was rare Kaelith would deal with humans. He was born on the opposite end of their forest out toward the deadlands, he would more often deal with humans who had already expired but would still be moving, they lumbered and staggered about like drunken forms of their nestling kin. Occasionally, Kaelith would meet his own in a similar state, he would give them a quick death, yet his blades rarely met living humans. Not that he would hesitate, they were likewise not allowed to enter the Ulthuri homelands. And as of late he was now charged with keeping them out.

He focused again on the man in front of him and tried to recall his encounter with the nestling boy, “I remember seeing the boy coming toward my camp, he seemed already injured. He was trying to hide, I believe from the men chasing him not from myself. I believed there may be a threat so I nearly loosed some arrows into the boy before being ambushed by the men you lot have slaughtered. When I came to he was nowhere to be found.” Kaelith would say feeling confident his memories were in order as the man would seem to be in deep thought about the fate of the boy. Though without another moment’s thought a light whistle could be heard on the wind as an arrow flew passed Kaelith’s vision thudding into the stone behind him as he would turn to face the new threat blades already drawn at his sides.



Rosesinger

