

The callous claw slashed against my left shoulder, leaving a crimson spewing mark. My clamoring echoed throughout the forest. Excruciating agony lingered about my shoulder, but despite that what's even more excruciating was the lingering agony burrowed in my heart.

“You curse beast! Only famished for fear and thirsty for tears!” I bellowed, glaring at the beast. Its eyes are two droplets of the sun's perspiration that irradiated on a face of a wyvern. The beast was colossal with ebony fur, and semi-truck tearing claws. For a moment, our eyes uttered our loathing.

This could be it... my vengeance shall be fulfilled, I thought, infuriated. I thrust my tawny dagger towards the beast, beckoning it to advance forward. Sweat doused my plain tee. My hand begins to tremble vigorously. Whoosh! The beast leaped over me in a blink, and vanished into the tenebrous spaces between the brandishing boughs.

Plank! I plunged my dagger into the bark of a withering elm. I knelt and dip my fingers into the frigid pond, dimly lit with a cerulean hue. Afternoon transpired. I examined my face. My light tan skin was splotched with soot. My flaxen hair, strands streaked with natural browns, was accessorized with leaves as if I were the heir of the forest elves. I leaned closer to the tinged surface, seeing hazel eyes in trepidation. I have been in this forest for a week, not paying much heed to the fact of how utterly lost I am. I closed my eyes, and that spur of moment, myriad of memories floods my mind. I dipped my head, shattering the pond with relentless ripples. I began to recall those gnawing, doleful memories. An uncanny, pyre ignited that shredded the walls. A cacophony of horrid howling caused the floors to quiver. I was amidst of invulnerable bulwark of flames. Soon, my family, one by one, their petrified bellows halted in dead silence. Through the scorching sparks...slanted, crimson eyes penetrated me. Those ebony figures were tainted with charred bits. My home has withered away rapidly. I eluded all those arduous impediments, but I would rather perish since that day.

I withdraw from the pond. I shook my head vigorously, and hydrated my parched throat. Minute by minute, the anger that seared my heart dwindled. My father once told me that the most dauntless man is one who controls his anger. For a moment, I lay supine in the dew-drenched

grass, strangling many ponders within my brain. Is avenging truly worth it? But what if that monster goes about slaughtering other lives? What is left when I succeed? Where will I go? With a grunt, I heaved myself up. My shoulder throbbed with anguish. Nevertheless, I forged ahead, but all that matters at this point is having my vengeance vanquish.

An ear-shredding screech caused the leaves to tremble. My soot caked boots bolted through the brambles and twigs, and I unsheathed my bow from my leather belt. I anchored an acuminous arrow towards the direction of the screech. Seconds later, my lope slid to a halt. It was the dead end of the forest. All that was left was a steep slope abounded of jagged rocks with sharpness of a knight's sword. This slope ushers to a pit of void darkness. Suddenly, a shadow lurched at me from the corner of my eye. I released my arrow. Thump!

"Bulls-eye!" I exclaimed, and examined the fallen beast, the same one that attacked me before. A hollow growl emerged.

"Forgive me but..." I thrust my bow at its forehead, "Your last breath will be arriving unless you surrender!" The arrow was driven deep into its chest. The beast feebly raises himself, but descends. One eye, the hue like the sun's core, gazed at me with a morose tint.

"Do you feel repentant?" I glowered, poking the beast's head with my sepia bow. The beast snapped at it, but my rapid reflex took advantage. The beast slumped down, agonized from my shot. But that morose flicker in its eyes lingers. Another growl took note, but this time its volume was raised drastically. In alarm, I whirl around descreying another creature...no...a demon. It had similar features then the one I immobilized, but it was exceedingly massive, reaching the height of twenty fifteen feet! I stumbled backwards, petrified. A split second later I was flailing in the air.

Slam! I pummeled into jagged rocks that tore my shirt, grazing my back. After regaining my bearings I grasped onto a ledge, halting my tumble on the treacherous slope. The demon swiftly makes its way downwards, its powerful legs retaining balance. I caterwauled, and crawled hastily towards the right where there were abundant of rocks to clamber on. But my speed was at a snails pace compared to the demon that pursued me. Abruptly, those blood-craving teeth attained my feet. With a cry of anguish, I took hold of my dagger and swiped it at the demon, but its brutal weight got me fatigued in seconds. Could this be the cursed beast that killed my family?

“You...it couldn't be!” I bellowed. Crash! The beast I immobilized, ruthlessly knocked the other, its jaws releasing my wounded leg. My heart felt as if it got compressed by an onslaught of anvils. All my ears could perceive was a howling, growing fainter until that note vanished. It was only the demon, which relentlessly craves for my death. It resumes the chase. The other beast was...gone. Swallowed by the throat of darkness.

“No...No!” I cried, eyes seared from arousing tears. This sacrifice has left another deep scar. A scar of repentance.

“I would keep your head low, if I were you punk!” A gruff voice utters. Without a second thought, I obeyed. Boom! A thick bullet burrows in the demon's leg. Yet the increasing agony triggered great anger. A small hand embraced my arm, dragging me towards the safer ground.

“Hang on, we got this!” He grinned. It was a boy, who looked roughly 13, who was fairly lean. He wore a dark navy tank top and tan pants. His alluring eye is azure as the depths of an untainted ocean. His wavy, brown hair was scarcely tinged with remnants of the forest. The man who pulled trigger looked like a conquering gladiator, with shoulder length hair as dark as the Minotaur's mane. His ashen eyes were eager for battle. He clutched onto a bulky rifle, with a hue that can blend into wilderness. He beckons me to join.

“Mind giving me a hand?” He muttered, “Your cheap bow could be a bonus.”

“Cheap?” I grumbled, “My father crafted that bow by-“ I got distracted by a valiant holler. The boy performed a back spring, in time of dodging a strike from the demon's arm, and draws out a gold rimmed blade. He lurched towards his opponent, a young hawk on the verge of shredding its prey.

“Enough gawking, get brawling!” The man shoved me into game. At that instant, a powerful hit flings the boy upwards. The boughs of a nearby tree halted his fall. I rushed to his aid, while the man reloaded his peculiar rifle. But it was too late. The wounded demon withdraws hastily from the area after an intimidating glare.

“I'll slice and dice that sucker later,” the man chuckles, “Thanks to you my days of rigorous tracking took its toll.” He gave a rough pat on my left shoulder.

“I should thank you, sir...” I replied, my voice hoarse, after helping the boy regain his ground.

“No problem! We heard a desperate cry, and I was the one who persuaded rock head here to check it out. Thank God!” The younger boy beamed.

“It’s Tabor, you puny runt!” Tabor groaned, “What’s your name, punk? How old are you?”

“It’s Ethric, and I’m 16. It’s a pleasure to meet you,” I held out my hand, but Tabor swatted my hand away.

“Whatever, but tell me...are you after that Khashgore, too?”

“K-khashgore? Well, if that’s what it’s titled...then yeah.”

“Why so interested in doing so?” Tabor’s eyes narrowed.

“I...” I sputtered, “I am a-avenging for the l-loss of my parents-a Khasgore barged into my home-and I-I think I found the one...” The boy solemnly gazed at me, and spoke,

“I am truly sorry. We are after that same beast-“

“Whenever you mention ‘we’, it makes me cringe. This puny runt seeks combat skills from me, but, he got no parents to deny the apprenticeship!” Tabor murmurs.

“It’s Pythian...you”, Pythian moves to my side and exclaims, “We should invite him to our quest! I mean...he got some neat biceps-“. He taps on my arm.

“I guess he could be a little more useful than you, puny python,” Tabor strides away.

“It’s Pythian! Geez! And I don’t like pythons!” Pythian whimpered, appalled. I staggered to the edge of the jagged slope, and asked,

“Is it alright, if you wait for me? I won’t be long...” I said. Pythian disappeared through the cluttered trees.

“God, forgive me...” I cried, “Forgive me...” Tears cascade down my cheeks. Its my entire fault by wounding that beast. Would it still have saved me, if it encompassed no injuries? But why has it saved me? Perhaps it was a quaint message.

“I been such a fool,” I whispered, “Thank God, I may know the reason why I was spared.” With that, I uttered a prayer before pursuing the two guys. A new quest has sprouted along my path.

“Ow!” My jaws clenched while Pythian was tending my wounds. He applied herbs, and even if his fingertips felt like gossamer, my wounds shrieked in pain.

“Hey Tabor, give him one munchie crunchie!” Pythian yelled. Tabor tosses a slice of bread at my lap, smeared with honey. My taste buds were in bliss. Tabor was meddling with his rifle. Pythian, yawning with boredom, was juggling several apples. He caught one apple in his

mouth, and cradled the other four in his arms. I laughed, and gave a short applause. Tabor was growing antsy.

“Let’s go, we have horsed around long enough,” he muttered and left the glade. Pythian and I exchanged stupefied glances, and pursued Tabor.

Even if it has an abrupt encounter, Pythian and I were getting along quite well. I couldn’t even count the number of mirth we shared during our trek. Tabor came across voluminous tracks, and then he whispered harshly,

“Shut up! These tracks are recent...it’s a whole gang up ahead!”

“But aren’t we only after one-“ I replied.

“Mark my words...one stupid move...you got a trigger happy guy around you,” Tabor chortled. I hesitated for a second, but I had no choice. The sky dimmed to a dull navy hue. After several steps, we were devoured by a tenebrous cave. We muted the sound of our crunching feet. In distance, we hear breathing of multiple Khashgore, which sounded as if they were in deep slumber. Tabor unhooked a grenade from his vest. I grasped his arm.

“Are you absurd? You can’t do that!”

“Damn it! Don’t get in my way!”

“But you said we were only after the plagued Khashgore!” Pythian grew petrified.

“They are all plagued!” Tabor was on the verge of pulling the pin, but I tackled him, and kicked the grenade out of his hands. Tabor rolled me over and pinned me to the ground. He let go after a few seconds and advanced towards Pythian.

“Don’t...hurt...him!” I screeched. The distant Khashgores twitched in their sleep.

“When did you begin to betray your mentor, runt?” Tabor shoves Pythian to the ground, menacingly.

“Tabor, we are after the plagued Khashgore! We trespassed their territory and we will be ripped inside out if we linger here but-“ I rose and rushed to Pythian, “I been saved by a Khashgore. And I realized when my home...my family...was burning down-those Khashgores were trying to save them! I don’t know the intentions of these creatures right now but please-“

“You think I believe in all that bull crud?” Tabor holler echoes through the cave,” I will wake up the whole crowd!”

“No Tabor! Then what is the purpose of our quest? You are acting like a plagued Khashgore yourself!” I beckoned Pythian to follow me out, and I continued,

“Quarreling won’t get us anywhere!”

“My whole village was torn up by that Khashgore! All of them are damn brutes!”

“Don’t let anger blind you! Like it has done to me. Only way I can avenge for my family...is to retain the good morals they have told me,” I was cut off by the arousing thumping of many feet. The volume of the callous cacophony amplified. It was too late to conduct self-defense attack. We burst into a lope, as fast as our legs could muster. After few minutes of evasion, we came across an unceasing, thrashing cascade that lay far beneath us, between the severed grounds. There was no other way to cross this impediment. Tabor points his rifle onto the oncoming onslaught, but Pythian halts him.

“We can’t face all those aggravated Khashgores...” Pythian whimpered, “You made them feel threatened!” A brilliant idea pelted my head. Tabor immediately knew what I pondered about.

Bam! The tree formed a treacherous bridge across the severed ground. The tree was really feeble, however.

“No time to lose! Ill hold onto the end of this bridge, and you guys get out of here!” I commanded austerely, “This bridge will slip if there isn’t any support at this edge.” Tabor tip-toed across the bridge, taking it as a tight-rope challenge. Pythian followed close behind. Fortunately they made it.

“Ethric! I’ll hold on to this end, and you better get your rear end here!” Tabor hollers resonantly, “And one more thing kid, but I’ll hate to admit it...I’m sorry.”

“It’s alright,” I grinned, “And here I come-“. Thump! Thump! Thump! My evasion halted in the middle of the bridge. A claw shatters the beginning of the bridge, causing the whole thing to topple. Tabor couldn’t hold on much longer.

“No! Ethric! Jump!” Tabor held out his hand frantically. But, alas, it was too late. I descended afar from the ground, seeing the cliff as if it was a haste treadmill. Bang! The plagued Khashgore, who grazed the bridge, was defeated. Tabor cursed loudly, and dropped his rifle...pounding the earth with his bloodied fist.

“Ethric!” Pythian dove after me, but Tabor retrieved him.

“I can’t lose another runt! What are you doing-“, Tabor was pummeled harmlessly by two resplendent white wings.

“Take care Tabor. Promise me, you won’t let anger blind you again...” Pythian disappeared from his view. Last thing I felt was two arms embracing me, and then my life...has departed.

“You are awake,” Pythian smiled. Startled, I aroused from the ground. My back felt lighter, but stranger. I turn my head around, and saw four wings that sprouted from by shoulder blades.

“You have an extraordinary heart, my friend. Thank God. This is the gift you receive...a guardian angel of dreams. Your first task is to find a girl, alone in a barren land that surrounds us,” Pythian affirmed, “You see, she is my friend. She has a lot of faith, but her heart is shattering.

I soared through the array of tawny clouds, my eyes scanning the barren land. My heart dove into the sea of sympathy, pondering about how forlorn it would be to be isolated from people...from hopes. I caught glimpses of someone kneeling on the parched earth. I descended a tad bit, and realized it was a girl. Long hair that reflected the oceans waves at midnight, tousled by the wandering wind. Her tattered gown was ashen pelted by tears grief. I found her. Suddenly, she spotted my descent with astonished, sepia eyes. She rose on her feet. I landed swiftly, and began to gradually traipse towards her. She mimicked my movement, marveling at the sight of me.

“An angel...” she breathlessly spoke, “has come for me?”

“Indeed,” I replied.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you,” she halted a feet away from me.

“Likewise,” I reached for the child’s hands and embraced them then spoke, “You have a lot of faith.” She looked away, unsure if she agrees. I stroked her by the side of her head and continued,

“It is true. Your friend says you have great faith. And I believe him.”

“Pythian?”

“Yes, Pythian. Remember you must keep seeing light with your heart when all your eyes se is darkness, because a true hero is made of the path they choose...”