

The Twilight Dance

Saturday, 07 January 2006

Last Updated Tuesday, 10 January 2006

The young man stood in the centre of the village, head bowed useless limbs hanging weakly from slumped shoulders. Standing with a confused look on his face, in his right hand he was weakly grasping a rusty sword.

Why were the walls painted red in patches, yet the stones showed though in other places? And why were the cobble stones that were worn with years of use slick with that same red paint? Strange decorations of dull green, brown and blue were discarded in piles around the town, some clutched in the hands of villagers whoseâ€™ faces were frozen with fear. As it began to dawn on him he noticed that all the decorations were attached to frozen villagers.

The blackened timbers of many houses crackled and snapped, whilst small orange creatures leapt from building to building, in an endless game of tag. A foul stench filled the air, and a cloud of black ravens, drawn by the smell of death descended on the village.

He was too late.

A tortured scream ripped through the crisp morning air, as the boy dropped the sword and grasped a blackened body in his calloused hands.

There was one week until the mid-year festival, and the town was bustling with noisy activity. All the villagers joined together in this new-found time of peace to prepare the village for the upcoming celebrations. The women of the village stitched colourful flags and banners, whilst the men towered above on ladders hanging their wives handy work around the town. The little children squealed and ran around the town causing general chaos, upsetting fruit carts and knocking over piles of carefully stacked cheeses. The atmosphere was contagious and even the village elders had a renewed twinkle in their wizened eyes. This was a time of peace and happiness, with a new King and opposing factions finally wiped out. The town far from the capital had been afflicted greatly by the wars of past and rejoiced in the tiding that the wars were finally gone. Merchants bringing rumours of raiding hordes soon forgot their tidings and were caught up in the festivities.

Caelem was especially excited this year, as it was finally deemed safe enough to hold the not so annual Twilight Dance at the festival. He planned to ask Rosalyn to dance with him, and they would be joined by couples both young and old in the sacred dance.

â€™Caelem!â€™ bellowed his father, â€™Get those cows in and feed the pigs.â€™

His fatherâ€™s name was Thommin, but everyone called him Thom. Although he seemed strict and harsh to the other boys, Caelem knew that he was just as excited as the children about the festival.

â€™Then wash up for dinner!â€™

Twenty minutes later, Caelem strode into the kitchen humming to himself. He was easily the tallest boy in town, and could wrestle with the best of the townsmen. His height and broad shoulders reflected his father, but his tender spirit was a gift from his mother. His mother was a slim attractive woman easily dwarfed by his father, but they were perhaps one of the happiest couples in the region. The family lived twenty minutes cart ride from the town on a sprawling farm that was situated in an idyllic setting of rolling green hills and mighty red cedar forests.

A warm fire glowed in the fire pit causing a rich aroma to rise from the bubbling broth. Caelem walked over to the hand trough and scrubbed his big calloused hands, to remove the grime and muck that can only establish itself after a hard days work. Shortly his father joined him at the trough, and then they sat down to enjoy the rich meal set before them.

The lone man stumbled through the forest, horse long run into the ground. As he ran branches lashed out at him and thorns tore his flesh. Glancing over his shoulder to try and glimpse the terror he was running from he knew they were gaining and would stop at nothing to prevent him warning of their approach. Seeing the light breaking through the trees up ahead, the man pushed himself harder to reach the safety beyond the trees. Suddenly a whistling filled the air, and the man was knocked forward into the thick golden leaf litter. With his last ounce of strength he looked down at the arrow lodged in his chest.

Rolling over in his warm bead, Caelemâ€™s body refused to awaken to the cold morning. Sighing in exasperation, Thom walked over to the trough and returned with a bucket of water, which he unceremoniously dumped all over the sleeping form before him. Caelem rose instantly cursing, only to have his ear clipped by his father.

â€™No need for that language. Hurry up youâ€™ve missed you breakfast, and you know weâ€™re taking the wagon into town to unload the last of the cheeses for the festival.â€™

â€™Also it will give you a chance to catch up with Rosalyn.â€™ His father added with a wink. Caelem rushed from the room blushing furiously with his fatherâ€™s throaty chuckle ringing in his ears. It was no secret that he liked Rosalyn, in fact most of the town knew, including all the other boys. Although she was by far the prettiest girl for miles, most of the boys recognised that Caelem liked her, and would not try to challenge him for her love. All that is except Eric. Eric was the local blacksmithâ€™s apprentice and he had no qualms about disrupting Caelemâ€™s plans.

High above the spiralling towers of smoke rising from the sleepy village, a silhouetted shape of a man on a horse disappeared back over the hill and into the woods.

The heat of the morning sun beat down on Caelem's brow, as the cart rumbled through the gates. The town was already a hive of activity in preparation for the upcoming festival.

The smells of fresh baked breads and peoples' breakfasts sent hunger pains to the young man's stomach, reminding him to wake up earlier in future. His father had moved off talking to a merchant about the past wars and the good times upon them now. Realising that his father would be a while, Caelem jumped from the cart. No sooner than his feet touched the cobblestones beneath him, a chorus of local youths greeted him.

"We thought you weren't coming to the festival!" called his friend Stephen.

"Yeah well I'm here now aren't I. Where's Rosalyn?"

"She's over by the"

"You can talk to your girl friend later," cut in Thom as he walked over.

"We have work to do."

"She's not my girlfriend!" cried an indignant Caelem.

But never the less followed his father back to the cart and began unloading the cheeses.

"Hey Caelem" called Stephen

"What?" he grunted as he hefted a barrel from the cart.

"Guess who's here."

Turning around in surprise Caelem beheld that beauty that was Rosalyn. She had fine long brown hair and crystal blue eyes. That combined with her shapely figure she was the fantasy of all the boys in town. Including, Eric the apprentice. Gliding over to Caelem in a brilliant red dress she hoisted herself up onto the tailgate of the wagon.

"So Caelem," she said with a twinkle in her eyes.

"Are you coming to the festival tomorrow?"

Caelem managed to stammer a "Yes."

"Good, I hope you can dance." She giggled, waltzing away with Caelem staring after her.

Upon seeing the dumbfounded look on Caelem's face, his father and Stephen burst into uproarious laughter, which only increased with renewed vigour when Caelem blushed bright red.

Crimson lapped against the walls as the roar of a thousand hooves clashed against the cobble stones. The vibrating sound was like that of waves crashing against rocks.

The midsummer festival was nearly over. All that was left was the Twilight Dance, in which all the couples in the region would dance, just like the days of old. The families on the farms had all returned from freshening up and changing their clothes in preparation for the dance.

Caelem had been especially dirty after winning the pole climb event, and competing in the wrestling with the other youths. He would have won, but Eric jealous of Rosalyn's favour of Caelem, punched him in the kidney and forced him to retire.

Now dressed in his finest, the towering farm boy danced with the pride of the village, under a carpet of stars. His nerves were high when Rosalyn danced him away from the other couples, and into the orchard. Gazing down into Rosalyn's crystalline eyes, his nervousness doubled as she stretched up and kissed him lightly on the lips. Quivering with adrenaline, he bent down and engulfed her in a passionate embrace.

They stayed long after the other couples had gone home to bed; sharing their love and passion in that timeless way that so many more had done previously that night.

Much later that night Caelem crept into his house and for once wasn't yelled at for being out late. His parents were already in bed wrapped in each others arms, fast asleep. Everything was perfect in Caelem's life now that he had found Rosalyn. As he slid into bed, his thoughts drifted to Rosalyn, lying in her own bed back in town. With that he fell asleep.

Waves crashing against the rocks
Screaming

"NO!" cried Caelem as he pushed his horse to new limits in the direction of the town.