

Now Only Silence Reigns

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Some stories are not told for a reason, for example my son, the aftermath of battle - for it reveals all sort of sins committed. Have you ever paused to think that perhaps all evil is not evil? On any dark night mistakes are made, I had a friend once, when I was young, who made a terrible mistake, and paid the ultimate price...

Now only silence reigns, the din of battle finally drowned out, as nothing but calm roamed the sky, its watchful eye surveying all and causing any who looked upon it to hold their breath in stupor. The sky was dark and roiling, a tumult of energy frozen in a second of reality with underlying colour of venom green and the brightest blue, clawing as if trapped behind unnatural energy. All the heavens had now arranged in a band circling the darkest night sky, with naught but a puncture wound in the centre coloured unnaturally red as if even the skies had been caught in the raging battle below. For tonight was the Night of Mysteries and Morrslieb had arched high in the aether causing the ground beneath to wrack in agony.

Morrslieb is an evening of locked doors, shuttered windows and restless nights, for all know its verde appearance is but a herald for what is to come. All know of the world's cancer, the dark hermits who emerge and toy with those dead and beloved, moulding them to whatever schemes they aspire to fulfil, perverting the order of things and causing even the Lady to weep.

Then quietly at first, the skeletal silence began to break. The clatter of rubble as a collapsed chapel began to stretch its arms woke the night and even the birds began to rouse. The ground around the chapel was scarred and burnt, a huge crater in the usually fertile lands, as a pock mark on a dame's cheek, beauty riddled with disease, a blade with a rusted edge. The village had also suffered, few houses remained standing and the improvised plaster littered the cobbled path, now amalgamated with the fragments of defiled bone that had but moments before shambled as a coordinated being it's eyes dull with malign intent.

The masonry yet again shifted as something moved beneath, with the elongated creak of a beam being moved aside the mournful chapel opened its arms and released the maiden trapped beneath, before falling back to the earth submitting to the wrack of an early demise. The figure that had pulled itself free was female. A tall and thin mannequin for which power and empathy wore as a cloak against the darkness. The maiden's hair was the colour of straw, though to describe it as such would be an insult, the curled locks, though dishevelled, framed her face like a permanent halo of light. She wore a gown of pale blue, akin to the colour of the sky in the early hours and though her raiment carried the essence of obvious wealth, she was unadorned with pennants or trinkets forged of the earthly ores that many a mortal man desire. Her gown was well tailored to her shape allowing freedom of movement whilst maintaining elegance, her corset, most likely made from the rare milkbone from far Ind, held her in a noble posture and alluded to some form of mortal vanity.

The damsel's eyes however were not of the usual breed, sapphire yet deeper, flickered with the same ethereal light that coursed around her pale fingers as she readied herself for the coming time of judgement. Whilst naturally pale of complexion the efforts of the battle had left her drained of colour turning her skin pale, however this only served to make her eyes all the more piercing.

Regaining her posture the maiden moved, slowly at first, from the heart of the crater to the remnants of the old Dwarven road that had delivered wealth to this section of Bretonnia for many a decade, ferrying the surplus of both nations across the border and through the mountains. She walked as if searching, her unearthly eyes scanning the dishevelled town, her walk affected by a limp, slowing her to a stilted pace leaving us able to hear the emerging birdsong that had been absent from the airs for far too long.

From the few houses that remained doors began to creak ajar, the peasants spilling onto the street to feel the morning chill on their faces and to bow their heads to their protector. A few children ran to touch the hem of her gown, their screams and cries now faded into the night. The maiden's face lit up with maternal joy at their coming however her eyes remained steely, frozen in a gaze of shadowed contempt. Walking from the town she finally reached the edge of the destruction, it is almost as if a line had been drawn in the ground — the grass lighter and more wholesome, if grass can be such a thing. The earth beneath her feet was darker in comparison and cracked, as if half the world had curdled in the night, the stench of undeath and fear still lingering in the night's air.

Following the path beyond the fields she brought herself to an old homestead, half wood, half stone, not dissimilar to the houses in the town, and also partly plastered, covering the animal muck that was used to shield the poor folk from the chills of winter. There was a small garden outside, overgrown with dark bulbous flowers not limp like the plants elsewhere, surrounded by an old picket fence, half rotten and held together by only the weeds that had reclaimed their severed brethren over the years. The maiden quietly scanned the outside of the hovel for any disturbance, noticing only a set of footprints that appeared fresh in the scattered soil.

Limping, then walking more steadily now, to the old oaken door which had most likely been stolen or salvaged from some much grander house the damsel knocked firmly to find it simply swung on its hinges allowing light to invade the darkened corners, scattering all manner of insects and illnesses. As she stepped into the hovel the air tasted stale, the stench dry on the tongue, with a bitter tang like that brought after a storm.

Then as one notices they are suddenly speaking too loudly, the air is filled with the most nullifying silence, the type that causes you to hold your breath for fear of being the first to disturb it. The only noise to ring like a child's wail is that of quiet sobbing, leading us, as if noosed and bound to the corner of the room. The maiden strides quickly to the side of a pile of furs from which the cacophonous whisper emerges.

Gazing down we see an ancient man dressed in clothes far too big for his malnourished frame, his hair although appearing to be freshly cut is wispy and white lying dead on his dried scalp. His face is taut the skin wrinkled around his nose, eyes and forehead, however these are no laughter lines, not the aged creases found from a life of joy and merriment, these are the aches from a life of bitter torment and those found on one who had aged far too quickly. His hands are gnarled and blackened, his fingernails curled under, and his thumbs bent outwards as if they are trying to escape the dying frame. The man had soiled himself, this much was evident upon opening the door, and his legs had wasted away until you could almost see his bones through his grey skin.

The maiden knelt beside him and laid her right hand upon his forehead, he was cold to the touch and his flinch was several seconds late. Inside the cavernous eye sockets the man's eyes writhed, his eyes glancing towards the doorway, as if attempting escape, however the body that carried them was far too frail and was beyond such mortal aspiration. A fire still burnt in the corner of the room, stew bubbling happily away in the cast iron pot. Old books clutched secrets upon their shelves and an old axe lay against the doorframe, its edge still sharp, there were no shutters on the only window and dissected flowers lay on a tree stump in the center of the floor.

The maiden's eyes had now dimmed to nothing but pity. It was this quiet pity, almost empathy, that was the last human emotion the man would ever see. As the moon of Morrslieb disappeared beneath the horizon the maiden closed her eyes, her hands perfectly still as she waited with the old man for the end, she had thought this man handsome and it pained her to see him in such a way. Though the night had ended she knew the horror had not. The land was troubled as if a great darkness had unfolded to smother all beneath it, and she knew within that this was only the beginning.