

Was it possible that we were going to war? Was it possible that the army would be called to mobilise and face tireless creatures that feed on pain and blood? My heart clenched when I was alone in my room that day after supper, barely allowing me my nightly meditation- another demand from my uncle, who wanted me to hone my Awareness for the longest possible.

That night, I saw it again, after so long a time, after feeling that I had put it safely behind me...

*...the temperature dropped, I was freezing, yet it was not my body that was cold, but my soul. My soul cried with the pain and suffering and death of a thousand victims, with the despair of more to come, with the outrage of those that cannot react. I stood up, shaking, and looked around, my hair flaying about me with non-existent wind. There was nothing to see, nothing to feel, and yet I was feeling as if the world's woes had invaded my soul, my heart, my mind... I took a step forward and SCREAMED in the sudden pain and fear. The spidery mist wrapped around me like a snake, tightening and tightening, covering my body, stifling my breath...! I SCREAMED AND SCREAMED until the mist wrapped tightly around my face, and I couldn't struggle, I couldn't react. I felt the blood not circulating; I felt my mind protest with the impeding death. I DON'T WANT TO DIE!*

*"You are stronger than it, my love. Fight it, resist it, you can control it!"*

*I shut my eyes tightly again and with my hands, my whole existence instinctively pushed against the tight cocoon that was sucking my life from my body...*

*...and surprisingly, it gave way the moment I had pushed as if it had never been there, and I could See again. I gasped in short breaths as I saw the grey, dull field covered with bodies of dead fighters, dead women, dead children and beasts. Dull crimson*

*spots did little to colour the pale, bluish flesh that Death had long since conquered. The stench of death and decay seemed to ooze into me and surround me while I was there, as if I was breathing the horror that the open, glassy eyes had seen, the skeletal hands had tried to fend off. The glassy eyes stared up at me, wide and lifeless, eternally begging me to prevent what was happening. But how could I?*

*“Intruder...you are an Intruder like her!”*

*The voice hissed and growled, eerie and unnatural, and darkness surrounded me, but it could not engulf me, and I could see the hunched figure, feeding from the already dead, sucking whatever was left from those that had no more to give, a creature that had no life and would not ever quench its hunger for it. It was hideous, pitiless, shameless, pulsating with Evil; a nebulous mass, spindly and constantly changing like an insidious illness, gnawing at humanity.*

*I shuddered, but would not stop looking at it. It leered at me, its glowing, slightly bobbing eyes bearing deep in mine, a fleshless finger pointing at me.*

*“UnVeilables will die...” it said, the voice now guttural as if coming from the depths of the earth. And the glassy eyes of the dead still looked on.*

*“Who are you?” I asked, reacting without thinking. My voice resonated clearly, and dispersed the wraithish darkness that vainly tried to cover the field of the dead and the dark figure that was pilfering it.*

*Instead of answering, it let out a deafening SCREECH and lunged at me- burning breath – my heart will burst – my mind screams in pain – my soul howls in revolt – SAVE ME, IT IS UPON ME!*

*UPON ME!*

*UPON ME!*

I woke up screaming, and didn't stop even when dad rushed into the room- it was as if I couldn't see him, as if I was awake but my soul and mind were still at that horrible place where death and decay and that creature were the sole rulers.

"What is it? What is it? Don't do this, Timmee, don't scream, talk to me, I am here, I will help you, THEMYA DARY-AN!" dad said, at first talking soothingly and quickly, then his voice escalating when he saw I was unresponsive, until he grabbed me by the shoulders and shook me, shouting my full name back at me. I gasped and blinked, looking at him, *really* looking at him, for the first time.

"What is it, honey?" he asked again, worriedly, still holding me tightly as if I would slip through his fingers.

My whole body started trembling uncontrollably, and I realised I was drenched in sweat. My heart wouldn't settle down, wouldn't stop beating as if I had spent the whole day running. My head was swimming and I felt completely void of energy, as if I had depleted myself in some effort. I took a breath to answer dad.

"UnVeilables... will die," I whispered, my voice hoarse and faint, and I felt my body go limp in my father's grip, although I couldn't pass out, my mind would not dare relinquish control to unconsciousness after the dream. Dad's breath caught, and he laid me back against the pillow. I lay there, limp and with no energy, yet my eyes wide open, not blinking, as if even that was hazardous. I would not stop trembling, I would not stop feeling so terribly, irrevocably cold.

"Sire, Master Aaron has just called, and is waiting in the living room," a servant came to my bedroom door, to announce. He sounded far away, as if I was hearing it all through a glass wall and everything was muffled.

Soon enough, uncle hurried into the room, his expression concerned and rushed as my father quickly spoke to him; but I couldn't hear him. I couldn't hear anything that was going on in my room. All I could hear was that screech and my heart beating. All

“Wake! Wake! Wake up! Wake UP!”

The wild command was accompanied by a terrific sound of destruction and swords clinging together. My eyes opened as wide as they could and my heart seemed to stop. I didn’t take in what I saw at first. All I saw was Uncle’s feet standing in front of me, his shadow shielding me from the sun...

Hadn’t we a canvas over the carriage?

“Take your sword! Wake up, Themya!” Uncle yelled again, and my body more than my mind responded to his command. I sat up, gripping my sword, and realised that we were, once again, under attack. The carriage had stopped, the canvas roof over its back was blasted away- that had been the sound that had first greeted me today. I turned to see just who it was my Uncle was battling, exchanging blows and making the whole carriage shake-

Clang! I saw my own hand in my field of vision, knuckles white against the black hilt of my sabre, crossing blades with someone I did not know and on whom I could only focus on the eyes. All the rest except his eyes were a blur, but they held me captive: wide, and almost black with his irises dilated almost all the way. It terrified me to the point I could not speak and I could not really think- and so it was my body that did all the thinking. The man snarled and brought his double edged sword down in a clean sweep that I could visualise lopping off my head; I screamed in fear in advance and jumped forward, bringing my sword to the side while his blow was still being delivered and his flank was open, just like dad used to instruct me. My blade hit against his thick leather corselet. The man growled in anger, not in pain, as I withdrew my sword and saw the metallic tint of blood against the blade.

I had no time to think that I had just willingly drawn blood from this man. From the left, where my Uncle was fighting, hot and acrid, the viscous liquid splashed against my cheek and temple, splattering all over me, and my opponent lost interest in me and turned towards there- where my Uncle had been standing. I gasped audibly as I saw Uncle’s opponent on his back on the ground, trem-

bling like a dying fish, his throat cut neatly at the carotid. His blood was black and crimson, jumping like a geyser at the rate of his heartbeat through his bloodied, glistening fingers that seemed devoid of any strength. His breath was gurgling with the telltale sound of death. I felt only relief that it was not Uncle Aaron in that position, not pity or remorse.

“Get off the carriage! Find Elsa or Gaescl! Don’t gawk, GET OFF THE DAMN CARRIAGE!” shouted my Uncle over the din and screams and shouts. I obeyed and jumped off with energy I didn’t think I had. But everything seemed still like a dream, as if I was in the dreaming world where anything was possible if I could imagine it.

All around the carriage were soldiers whose uniform I did not recognise except vaguely. They were not many- at the most twenty... but it was less than half that number that had cost us Ces-sile. How I wished she were here now, to protect us magically and throw them all back with just one single incantation!

A blast from above me whizzed past in the form of an angered gust of wind and a sword missed my head by inches. I blinked, wide eyed at the man that had just fallen down- he had dropped his sword and he was clutching at his throat as if suddenly air would not be accepted in him. I looked up and flinched as Uncle glared at me from the carriage, sword in bloodied hand, with the wildness of the combatant in his eyes and the fear of death in his voice- fear of *my* death:

“Don’t stop to think and look! Stop and you di- argh!”

He instinctively jumped back as a wavy bladed dagger, a kris, came flying towards his chest. He missed a step and fell off the other side of the carriage, out of my sight as the canvas roof obstructed the view along with the rest of the vehicle. Two enemies rushed to where I calculated he must have landed. I clenched my teeth in anger and spite towards myself, as it was I that had rendered him in this compromising position. I reasserted my hold on the hilt of the sword and ran to round up the carriage-

Another man jumped me, his sword diagonally in front of his body, another dagger at his side, his mouth contorted in a hideous grimace that bared all his teeth to the gums in a display of carnivorous instincts against me. He attacked with a terribly strong swipe to my side which I parried, but it rattled my whole sword arm to the point I feared it would break. He did not give me the time to recover- his sword came against me again in a downwards ark that would split my head in two and I had no chance but to clash blades with him again. I felt the force of the blow all the way down to my pelvis, and the momentum threw me backwards. The man snarled and grinned as he ran towards me. I yelled in fear as unwittingly I brought up my legs to stop him. He ran into the soles of my feet, effectively stopped- the force scraped the ground against my back- and lifted his sword up to bring it down for a killing blow.

*I have lost my sword!* My mind screamed at me. I pushed as hard as I could to at least somehow augment the distance between my attacker and my body with my feet. The pant leg silkily fell backwards and gathered up in folds against my knee, revealing what Uncle had told me was my last resort... I heaved upwards and to the side as the man started his deadly ark and leaned forward against my feet, pulled the dagger out of its sheath around my leg and plunged it in the first site I thought I could make it bury to the hilt- the man's thigh.

I was rewarded with a maddened scream of pain from the man and a shuddering of all his muscles against my feet- I had clearly broken his impetus. I grinned wildly myself and twisted the blade as I pushed violently with my feet, making the muscles of my belly protest in tiredness- but the man fell. I sprung up and noticed my sword next to the man that was gripping the hilt of my dagger that was still inside his leg. I rushed to get it. As soon as I was near enough, I felt the burning of metal against my own leg. The man was trying to still get at me with his own dagger, in rage that disregarded everything else.

But I, too, was enraged. I stepped on his arm by literally

jumping on it and I liked hearing his groan. I put all my weight on that arm until I heard the bone snap and just as he rolled to get at me with his other arm, I kicked him with all my force in the face. His head jerked backwards, his face blossoming in blood, and he remained motionless. As soon as he didn't move anymore, I bent and picked up my sword, panting, and looked around in a second of uncertainty about what to do next:

Ustyan was not actually fighting with sword or dagger, but he did cooperate well with Gaescl who was protecting him by shielding him from blows, just like he had done when they had been attacking us not more than a day ago. Gaescl was fighting with two swords that gleamed with magic resonance- he had engaged as many as four of the enemy, and as soon as they were touched by the blades he was wielding, much less actually hit by them, armour tore and flesh split painfully, all sorts of liquids except blood sprinkling around as the wound was made.

Elsa surprised me: she was fighting with a scimitar, trying to hack her way through another four or five enemies and try to get to Uncle that was still behind the carriage, hidden from view by the fallen, destroyed canvas roof. Her motions were fluid like water, and her eyes blazed with urgency and anger. If her opponents didn't stumble or yell or fall, I would not have believed her movements to be anything but choreographic- that was how smooth and aesthetic she looked in her frenzied deadly dance of both defence and attack.

But in her urgency to move, she sacrificed perception and she did not see what I did: A large, burly man brandishing a flail ran up to her from the rear.

"Elsa!" I screamed and I realised that I, too, was running although I didn't remember either deciding it or starting to do so. The man swung the flail in a deadly arc towards her head, but Elsa had heard my scream and instinctively ducked. The swinging ball of metal flew well past over her head and struck one of her opponents who was thrown back several meters and remained there, forever

frozen in a horrid, faceless, deformed grin highlighted by crimson, scarlet and black. As soon as he fell, viscous blood spread like a halo around his head on the ground. My momentum stopped because I stabbed with my sword at the man- I hadn't aimed for anything in particular, in a foolhardy wish to draw his attention away from her.

I succeeded.

The man growled like a beast and turned to me, the flail whistling over my head in a heavy, ominous way. The stab wound my sword had afforded him in his back did not seem to even bother him, much less impede him. I clenched my teeth, realising that I could very well be the next one lying on the ground deprived of a human face by that ghastly ball that he moved around with the ease of a child shaking a rattle. I could be the one spilling my blood and brain to form a halo around my head, as a grotesque symbol of the sanctity death granted. He leered at me, with glistening white teeth that seemed eager to taint themselves in my flesh. I back stepped, bringing my own, tainted blade upwards. I felt my eyes so wide that they would allow for my eyeballs to fall out of their sockets and... I froze.

I saw him coming against me and all I could do was back step, hoping that nobody behind my back would stab me to my death. I could do nothing else but stare at that great flail that had done so much damage with one blow, and just imagine myself dead by it. I felt my knuckles tighten painfully around my sabre's hilt, I felt my knees go rigid, as if bracing for the blow would make it any less catastrophic. I couldn't even shout for help, and suddenly the din of the battle, the yells and sword clashing and thuds and growls and howls of pain or victory or despair crashed down on me and deafened me- the odours of blood clotting, blood spilling, excrement being exposed in the air along with other body fluids and intestinal tissue suffocated me.

"STAB HIM!" I heard a shriek that seemed to rattle my brain and I whimpered and shut my eyes while flinching and swing-

ing upwards in the clumsiest way that would for certain irritate my father. My sword flew from my hands like a trapped animal finally jerking free with a loud clang and scraping of metal against metal. I fell to the side, my arm screaming in pain, but the blow from the flail had ricocheted away from me in a clash that had more luck than skill.

But the man was not stopped, and now I was unarmed, staring up at a mountain-sized man that was feeling all too glad to step on someone that compared to him was the size of a bug. I had found my resolve again, but now I had no way to defend myself and to get up with the man looming over me meant almost certain death. He laughed triumphantly, assured that now his soldiers would not allow Elsa to come to my help, as I could deduct from the sounds of fierce sword-fighting going on that were heard behind him and Elsa's agitated cries for me to hold on. I crawled backwards on the ground to put some distance between me and him, but all it took was a stride to cover it. He slurred something and kicked- I felt as if my stomach shot out my back as I was thrown back a good more distance away than I had achieved on my own. The pain nullified anything else that I was feeling- and in that sense, it was very, very helpful, because it gave me the opportunity to focus and do the one thing that could save me from this foe:

I raised my hands and coaxed the Balance to protect me, and willed myself not to shut my eyes at the flail coming down on me with force. My blood heated with the effort and my flow became intense and almost magnetic in its density- I thought I saw the atmosphere flicker around me as the shield formed seconds before the flail hit.

The metal ball slammed against my shield and the man couldn't pull it back anymore. He yelled in frustration and anger as he tried and tried to release his weapon from the clutches of my Flow, but to no avail- before his very eyes, the flail's swinging, deadly ball sizzled and popped and shuddered, shrinking and growing smaller and smaller until it was gone. The man bellowed some

word I couldn't understand and raised his arm, unsheathing an odd sword-like giant kris, his eyes flashing eerily with the cold void left when all human emotion is completely evaporated. I coughed and with it liquid came out, and from my nostrils I couldn't anymore breathe, but I was determined not to let my odd shield falter- if it was the last thing I did.

And then, it was as if the man suddenly stopped, and his mouth bubbled and overflowed with black, thick blood. His eyes widened and the spark of life left them so quickly that that in itself was shocking. He fell to the side heavily, making the ground shiver slightly- or perhaps that was just my idea. The hilt of a sabre was all that protruded from his back, implying the angle in which it had entered, destroying as many organs as were possible in one stroke. Behind him, slightly tilted to the side, teeth clenched and bared, eyebrows so furrowed together that his eyes seemed black, with blood splattered against his face and clothes and his one arm completely drenched in the substance, was standing Uncle Aaron. I let my shield disperse and whimpered as he rushed to me. I didn't want him to come and nurture me now just as in the same time I wished for it madly- but there was battle raging all around us, and he couldn't afford to have his back exposed, he shouldn't let himself be caught off guard.

But was there any battle waging around us anymore? Alarmed voices seemed to come all around mixed with the metal clangs of swords and other weapons being dropped, and the quick language spilling from mouths all around without me able to understand a single thing- was it truly over? I peered around just as Uncle paused to do so as well. All the standing enemies- about five of them, had abruptly stopped fighting and were standing, arms spread to their sides, having dropped their weapons, pleading with us in their language that we could not understand... or at least most of us couldn't understand.

"They surrender! We have won!" Ustyan said and I felt relief wash over me. With it, it brought all the pain and agony and