



A Night of Loss

By Adam Carroll

The night air was frigid and chilling to the bone as my horse raced along the road. I was another half hour's ride back to my family's cottage on the outskirts of Korihana when I saw the silhouette of the smoke in the clear, bright night's sky. The only sounds around me were my horse's hooves pounding on the familiar path and her snorting as I urged her to run faster. Soon I was able to smell the smoke, but there was also another faint scent in the air, it was sharp and metallic.

Then, as though a sign of things to come, I noticed a dark lump in the road. In the same instant, a horse came bolting by me – its saddle empty. I slowed my horse as I approached the shape, fear and dread filling my heart as I realized the lump was a man's body lying face down in the dirt and snow of the road.

I stopped to inspect the man's body lying on the road. I rolled him over onto his back, and looked into a face that I had known all my life. It was my brother. He looked at me with tired and pain-filled eyes. With his dying breath he muttered, "Ferrin, broth..." His eyes rolled back and he sighed the last air out of his lungs.

Tears filled my eyes and my breaths became short and ragged as I pulled my brother close to my chest. A few minutes later, my fit had passed, and I laid him down on the ground to inspect his wounds. The wound on his side was deep, it likely punctured his lung and caused him to bleed out in a short time. Judging from the amount of blood where his body lay, and the short bloody trail left on the path, it looked like he had been attacked very near this very spot.

I mounted my horse and took off down the path at a gallop. I was now only a five minute ride from the cottage. The air was thick with smoke and again I smelled the sharp metallic smell of blood.

As I rounded the final bend in the road, I found myself facing what I feared - my family's cottage burning and two more bodies lying on the path. One lay facing away from the cottage as though he had been running. The other body lay face down with two crossbow bolts protruding from his back.

I dismounted to inspect the bodies. The first man was wearing a highwayman's mask. His left arm was nearly severed, attached by only some skin and muscle tissue. I realized that wasn't what had killed him when I saw the sword that had been run through his chest. The

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blade was lodged to the hilt in his back and protruded from his breast.

I recognized the second man as I drew close. He was my father. My eyes welled with tears. The two crossbow bolts in his back and large puddle of blood offered mute testimony that my father was dead.

The cottage in which I had grown up was completely engulfed in flames. As the flames leapt into the night sky, I could feel the scorching heat even though I was still fifty feet away. It was then I noticed the blazing body of a woman in the doorway.

“Mother!” I screamed into the night. This time, as I fell to my knees, I let the tears roll, and the racking sobs come from the depths of my soul.

I was too late to help save any of my family. In the city there had been talk of the highwaymen attacking homes on the outskirts of the city. “No one ever thinks it will happen to them or their family,” I whispered. “I will avenge you my family. I will bring you justice. I will punish the men responsible for your deaths.”

Not willing to spend a night filled with grief and anger, by moonlight I dug three deep graves for my family. The rogue’s body I dragged far into the forest, leaving him for the carrion beasts. I returned to the still smoldering ruins of my family house. There was nothing to recover. I saddled my horse and left my home.

As I started down the road towards the city, I felt almost numb in my grief. My horse seemed to sense my pain and plodded along slowly. My horse whinnied and twitched her ears, as though she could sense something I couldn’t.

Without warning a twang sounded in the woods to my left, followed by the sound of wind whistling across the fletching of an arrow. A curse came a second later as the man realized he had missed. This brought me out of my stupor, back into the real world.

Before the man could get another shot off, I was off my horse, sword drawn and ready for combat. There was another twang, and I heard my horse whinny in pain. A dull thud sounded behind me. I glanced back to see my horse lying dead, a bolt in the side of her head.

I dropped to a crouch and began sidestepping towards a tree a few feet from where I stood. Another twang rang out. An arrow buried itself in the tree mere inches from my face.

Now I knew where my attacker was. I lunged towards him, my sword flashing in the moonlight as a bloodlust cry escaped my lips. Not even a second later there was the metallic clang of two swords clashing in the silent night’s air.



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“You bastard!” I yelled as he parried yet another attack I threw his way. “You killed them, all of them, my family!” He swung and his sword found flesh this time, a glancing blow to my shoulder.

As I rolled away from the hit, I lashed out and kicked him in the chest. He tried to step back, but hit a tree. This stopped him in place and distracted him just long enough for my sword to penetrate his belly.

His sword fell to the ground as he reached to where I had run him through. He panted, “Sorry kid it was only business.”

I freed my sword from his stomach and, with one blow, cut off his head. Warm blood splashed my face and the air became thick with the metallic smell of it. Silence fell around me.

I’d never killed a man before. Any sadness it brought was nothing when compared to that of losing my family. I quickly left the woods and returned to the road, making my way back down to the city on foot. It would be a long, sad, and lonely walk. Maybe it would help me cope with the loss this night had brought.



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