
Description: This is an example of a short story written for the *Dragon Age* universe.

This story was developed with these core ideas at its foundation:

- The protagonist is a young, POC trans-heroine.
- The story takes place in the lesser-explored country of Rivain.
- The writing follows some small stylistic nods from *The Masked Empire* by Patrick Weekes.

Rites of Conscription

Bodeva looked out the second story window of her room at the inn, watching the flooded road with dark eyes. When she leaned against the window frame, Bodeva could just see the notice board in the small stone courtyard. On it, a conscription notice with a weather-stained ribbon flapped in the wind.

As she craned her neck down to see it, she pressed the side of her forehead against the cool rippled glass and watched as her breath fogged over the pane. “Maybe the storm will delay the conscription march. Even for one more night. If not that long, at least let me enjoy one more hot meal out of the rain,” she thought to herself, warming her hands on the outside of her tin dinner bowl. The stew inside was dark red, thick with root vegetables and a meaty broth. There would be few meals like this on the road, in the rain and the damp.

The first rains had come only a fortnight ago, and with it, her conscription papers. The last time she had seen the rites of conscription, they were for her father. The war had spirited him away, and for a time there had been no word. Not until a decorated soldier returned to their village with only his shield and a letter from his commanding officer. That was ten years ago.

Bodeva pushed down the lump in her throat with a hot spoonful of stew and turned away from the window. She *would* survive this war, Bodeva had decided. She had to. She was only seventeen, and there were too many things she still meant to do.

She had never once swam in the sea. She had never gone with her sisters and the village girls on their pilgrimages to dance at the Allsmet. She had never been kissed, not even as a dare.

Bodeva ran a finger over her lips, and then absentmindedly across the prickle of fresh stubble on her chin. She made a mental note to shave after dinner, and another note to appreciate the treat of a warm basin of clean water and a wide vanity mirror while she was still in civilization. On the road, she would be using the small, coin-sized mirror on the lid of her compass and whatever luxuries the wilderness of Rivain could afford her.

A draft of cool air could be felt from a crack in the window. Bodeva shivered, and pulled her hood back up over her head, making it sing with a dull pain. It had taken hours for her sisters, Beya and Meranti, to comb out her flowing braids two days before, and more hours still to reweave them in a practical style that ran along her scalp in thin, tight lines. “Not as pretty to be sure,” Bodeva thought with a twinge of regret, but it fit well under the soldier’s helmet she brought with her.

She sat back on the small, firm bed and readjusted her armor. Bodeva would wear it until the sun set, when the likelihood that the soldiers would march that night had passed. The armor of small horn plates and brass maille was foreign to her, but the weight and pressure of the armor was comforting. She hadn’t expected it, but she was grateful for it. Her sisters had traded their best dresses and a few trinkets for new clothes and armor for Bodeva. Her own dresses had been traded for dried goods, fruit, nuts, and salted jerky. The generosity of her fellow Rivani countrymen would need to account for the rest.

Bodeva’s thoughts returned to her sisters. They had insisted on walking with her all the way to the crossroads. The three of them had traveled together arm in arm along the dirt road, singing folk songs and sharing a stash of decadent candied figs brought by Bodeva. As they walked through the drizzle of a summer storm, they talked furiously about books and which village boys had dark perfect skin and wicked smiles.

When they had arrived at the crossroads, Beya and Meranti had said their goodbyes. Outside of the inn, the three sisters had held each other tightly, tears flowing freely on their faces. Through blubbing hiccupps, Beya demanded Bodeva for letters every fortnight while she traveled. Her own voice tight with grief, Bodeva promised to do her best. Meranti, so often the strong one, wept silently as she held her younger sisters, the three of them shaking gently from the thrum of sobs deep in her chest.

But that was yesterday. And in the twenty-some hours since their departure, Bodeva had felt the hollowness in her chest grow until it was pushing out against her ribs. She gulped down a lungful of air and steadied her nerves.

She *would* be back. This was not goodbye. She had a plan.

She would go with her fellow conscripts to war. She would be watchful and patient in her training as a soldier. If it ever came to combat, Bodeva would choose her opponents on the battlefield carefully, and do everything in her power to survive. Everyday, she would remember what she was fighting for.

She would fight to protect her home and her sisters. No matter how deeply they loved her, she suspected they would never quite understand. Despite the bitterness in that truth, Bodeva’s resentment had long passed. It would all be worth it, to come back home to her sisters and her small world where she was known and seen and loved.

Bodeva closed her eyes and tried to conjure the image in her mind's eye:

She could hear the jingle of her chainmail as she walked down that familiar road to their home. In her nose, she could smell the wild lavender and dill that grew in patches along the streams. She could imagine seeing the yellow thatched roof from the road, and could hear sounds of her sisters singing and laughing within.

They would greet her with tears and shouts at the door. Bodeva would cross the stone threshold of her father's house and return the bronto hide shield to its place on the wall. She would clean the dirt from under her nails and wash the dusty patina of the road from her skin.

Her sisters would braid her hair long and loose down her back, and adorn each braid with delicate glass beads. They would put on their gossamer festival gowns and paint their eyelids silver with shimmering paints. And she would finally dance under the stars at the Allsmet.