

Fear was all too common to Morgon. For as long as he could remember he had lived with it, a constant edge against his throat. With time he had learnt to rest despite the looming dread, though it was always brief, never slumbering without half an eye open. This night he would not have any rest, not for a moment, for this night was the first time King Morgon Banefort had been afraid of anything other than his own power.

"Silence!" he barked at the nearest thrall, to little avail. Nothing beyond taking their tongues could end their endless whispers, their pleas for aid. Would their whispering continue in the morning? Would their pleas be answered by the lions outside his gate? Perhaps he could hide them below, there they could hold out for days, but what would be their point. Come morning they would have served their purpose, one way or another. "And light the fire."

Deep red the flames soon reached far above the walls, a blinding beacon in the starless, moonless night. Tower, men, and weirwood all glowed in a bloodred sheen as the stench spread across the scarred forest. It was not the first fire that had scoured the godswood, though it may well be the last. Morgon would need it to be the greatest as well if there would ever be a chance of success.

"Hellfire," he muttered, half a curse and half command. "It will not be enough." Even as the black smoke reached to the skies to the chorus of the thralls lamentation Morgon knew it would not be enough. Old bones ached as he stood from his throne, ever so slowly walking forward. Winter had come for him, one which no fire in the world could stave off. All his might, all the sacrifices could not delay his inevitable and bloody end. Now he did not know if all his powers could turn the tide.

If only he had acted sooner. If only he had seen the danger. Yet, what could he have feared of mortal men? Children clad in red and gold, the whole lot of them playing with swords. Lannister, Reyne, none of them had any real power, none could match his powers. Where they fought with spears and pretty bronze, he had the power over life and death itself.

And still they came. With fire, great ships of war, and a burning hate. Morgon could not recall if he had ever caused the "King" of the Rock any harm. There had been none that could warrant this. Twenty years of war, and for what? His home, destroyed. Come morning that King may well set the Banefort ablaze, or tear it into the sea.

The mere thought was enough to ignite the anger within him, and the powers he had feared for so long. What did it matter if he could not control them now? If he were to die, or his home was to fall the victory would not give the Lion any joy.

Donning the iron band, with its single jewel shining crimson and red he began to speak in the tongue of the old powers. His voice rose and fell with the screams of the burning, the red leaves of the heart tree blackening from the rising ash and sot. For a while King Morgon wondered if

she would appear, but ultimately did not care. The power of Kings were great but other men bled just as well as one crowned in gold.

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Though the rain had stopped the skies were still grey. It had begun well before dawn, heavy droplets falling like arrows. Now the sea was still, as was the few great oaks that still stood beyond the battlefield. A new forest had grown there in the morning, one of fallen swords and bones.

Within the Banefort the carnage was even greater. The bodies of the slain were everywhere, their stench could be felt throughout the castle. Everywhere the battle had raged there was destruction and death, the air reeking of the souls of the dead. At times one could still hear whispers, please for help and salvation. Yet those voices were drowned by the roar of the lions.

A whole pride there were, a male with a mane of wet gold and his wives. Whenever King Morgon dared move they would lunge for him with hungry eyes, their claws mere inches from his face. Kneeling in the mud all it would take would be one weak link and Morgon would be devoured, torn to shreds if he was lucky. Still the "King" of the Rock had not come himself yet, too busy leading his sheep to the slaughter.

"So that is him?" a stern voice called from behind. "That's the warlock?"

"King," Morgon corrected him, turning his head to sight his foe. There were several men, each clad in golden armour more costly than the next. Five, maybe six there were, followed by many more in lesser attire. "I will forgive your ignorance this time cub." Even the lions seemed to take offence as one clawed for him whilst its master drew a sword. Of course it too had a golden sheen.

"Father, take his tongue, now," the man said, taking a step forward. The tallest and most golden of the men halted him, moving forward himself.

"King. Warlock. Monster. What does it matter?" the man asked, standing tall and proud. Morgon did not cower but looked the man in the eyes.

"I may yet have mercy on you cub, if you show some manners." Morgon's words were met with laughter from the Lannister men, though their mirth was cut short. By the wall sat a corpse, who proved more alive than dead. It lunged haphazardly for one of the princes, the corpse's knife stabbing through bronze and flesh. Not a mortal wound, but the turn of mockery to fear in the men's voices was music to Morgon's ears.

"Make sure they are dead," the King of the Rock commanded once the corpse had been properly slain. "Behead them all if you have to. Especially around him," he said, glancing at the kneeling man.

"Begone from my castle if you fear the dead King Loreon," Morgon barked hoarsely. "Or perhaps you wish to join them?"

"Will you not end this bloodshed?" the King sighed, sitting himself on a nearby rock. The pride followed him with their green eyes as well. "You have fallen, let your men rest. What does it serve you to keep fighting." To that Morgon simply shrugged.

"What other purpose could they serve? No cub, I am content to let you pay the price for your \*ambition\*," Morgon spat, uttering the last word like a curse. "Every man slain here is a victory for me."

"And if I kill you?" Lannister replied. "Will the thralls stop fighting then?"

"How would I know?" Morgon scoffed. "I have never tried being dead." That seemed to amuse the other King, and it even put a crooked smile on Morgon's face. "Will your pack stop fighting once you are dead?"

"No, that I know for certain," Loreon stated confidently. "And I do not need to die to prove that."

"A shame. You would make a fine corpse, I am certain," Morgon continued in an almost jovial tone. "Though I suppose you would be unruly. Difficult to bring down for sure, with that armour of yours. Imagine the power of your dead hand. You could crush a man's head with ease, as if it was an egg. Would your sons be able to slay you I wonder, and how they would fear when their own father devours..."

Morgon's speech was interrupted by a heavy boot to the face, throwing him into the mud. At once the lion's were upon him, fighting their fetters. For a moment he was afraid, though he did not let it show.

"Any last word monster?" the cub roared, drawing his blade. "It will be the last grace I give you."

"A fine blade," Morgon mused, admiring the sharp edge of the sword. "Though it will not kill me. Forgo your ignorance cub, you cannot slay me. No matter the blade I will not let your insolence stand."

And even so Morgon spoke no more as Lion's blade cut through flesh and bone. .

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"Feed him to the pride," Loreon muttered. "Burn whatever is left and take the ashes far away from this place."

"As you command your highness," one of the captain's said, as two others begun rolling the body of the former king towards the lions. "And the sons? The princess?"

"Slay anyone and anything that resist, keep the girl safe until I can figure out what to do with her. Is the godswood secure?" Loreon asked, handing his sword to one of his sons.

"Yes your highness, as safe as it can be. Though the men are loathe to go there, it have a foul air to it."

"A foul stench you mean. No I need to pray," the King stated plainly, beckoning his host to follow. A weight seemed to lift from their spirits as they left, though three of his sons lingered behind to see the warlock's end.

"Do the thralls still fight?" Loreon asked a nearby captain, the man nodding a silent answer. "Guess that means we have to clear it out then. I am of half a mind to let Lord Banefort clean up this mess." Near the godswood a faint breeze brought the smell of death upon them, so strong that the youngest prince threw up his breakfast. Even Loreon gagged at the sight of the bonfires.

"Father this place is cursed," the eldest prince said. "We should not be here."

"I do not fear the dead," Loreon said. "And the gods will not let us suffer harm, not now. They will look with joy upon what we have done here to..." His speech faltered at the sight of the heart tree. It was a tall, slender thing, its branches reaching high and far. Many of its red leaves had been scorched black, but more unsettling were the pieces of flesh that lay by its roots and the foul grin upon its face. Once those eyes may have been kind but now they glared with evil intent. And upon its brow sat a band of black iron, as if the tree itself had been crowned. Its lone jewel seemed dull now, all luster gone from it.

"Take that thing off," Loreon commanded, waiting for his men to act. "An offence to the god themselves. Had you no honour warlock?"

"Your highness, it will not come off," one of the men said. "There is no clasp. They must have put it there from above."

"Without breaking the branches?" the eldest prince scoffed. "How petty can you be, to waste his powers on something so futile? Father, should we cut it down? Perhaps we can hack off the iron?"

"No. The gods have suffered enough here. Leave it, and this castle. Let the survivors deal with this horrid pile of bones."

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"Selwyn! Where are you! Come out already!" Minisa called, looking high and low for her brother. Helena also called out for him, as did Loreon. She had found everyone else already, and only needed to find him. "You won, alright."

"This is no fun," Elys said. "I am going inside. Want to play catch?"

"Mhm, you're it!" Loreon said, darting away with Elys in hot pursuit, Helena following a moment after. Before Minisa could do the same she heard a voice call for her, faint and from far above.

"Wait! Wait for me," Selwyn said as he climbed down from the old heart tree. How he had climbed so far up Minisa could only guess.

"How did you get up there?" she cried, trying to make herself heard.

"I climbed!" he replied, swinging from one branch to the next. "You just jump from the mossy rock to..."

"Selwyn!" their father shouted, marching towards the heart tree. "Get down this instant!"

"I am!" Selwyn called, nimbly climbing down to a lower branch, only for it to shatter into a thousand pieces. Minisa let out a scream as her father rushed forward, a rain of soft wood falling upon them. By some stroke of luck Selwyn held onto another branch some six feet of the ground. She had never seen their father so furious or afraid before as he helped Selwyn down.

"What were you doing up there?" Tyrion said, breathing heavily. "You could have fallen and broken your bloody neck! What would you have done if you fell? Seven Hells I..." he muttered, leaning against the heart tree for a moment. As if he had been stung by a bee Tyrion darted away, his hand leaving a dent in the wood. Poking it with a finger the bark bent inwards before it tore, a white and red wound opening in the tree.

"Its rotten to the core," Tyrion mumbled, tearing out a chunk of nearly black sludge.

"There is something there," Helena said, pointing to the brow of the old trees face.