# 1. As You March Towards Your Death...

Eriwen opened her eyes to a world of ash and ruin. The last thing she had recalled was her mother pushing her underneath the throne, and the smell of strong magic. When she awoke, rather than the high ceiling of their hive's throne room, an overcast sky peering down the crater that was once her hive awaited her. The air stunk of char and the lingering scent of ozone, a distinct feature of powerful magic.

"Mother?" Eriwen's sweet voice cracked, her throat dry and burning as she inhaled microparticles of ash. As she looked around, a gasp ripped from her. Skeletons. So, so many skeletons. Drones who had begun to flee into the throne room leaned in piles against the ruined frame that once held the door, some traces of chitin and leathery skin hanging off of their bleached bones.

Eriwen nearly vomited at the sight of drones she could no longer recognize in piles, torched away with some foul spell. It was then she spotted a skeleton far larger than the others, lankier and more elegant, slumped over the top of the throne behind her.

The scream that escaped Eriwen was inequine and primal. Carefully, Eriwen held one of the twisted bones of her mother's hoof in her own warped forelegs. She sobbed, reaching to push some of her mother's rosy mane that remained plastered to her skull away from her empty sockets. Eriwen barely registered the fact that her poor mother's mane had fallen out and withered away at the slightest touch. She simply couldn't believe anything she was seeing.

"Oh, Mother… how has this happened…?" she whimpered, "what do I do…?" Eriwen spoke to the corpse of her mother as though it still held a modicum of life, as though her mother would suddenly look at her with the same smiling green eyes ever again. However, the bleached bone pile did not answer, deathly still.

Eriwen would sit there for hours, the overcast sky darkening until a terrible downpour rained down upon the ruined hive. Even then, Eriwen did not move a muscle. The crimson-maned Queen simply wept, and when she ran out of tears to cry, she sat completely still. She cared not if a predator or rival Queen heard her relentless blubbering; her pain was too great.

It was only after the next dawn when the rains would subside that Eriwen shifted at all. Her hunger had begun to gnaw, and some part of her still willed her to stand. Eriwen's eyes, once a bright golden, were dulled and sunken after a night of grief-driven howling. Her voice was long since lost to the endless screaming. So it was silently that Eriwen stood to her full height, gazed down upon her mother's skeleton with a hollow expression, and walked away. She didn't notice the crunching of drone bones or sifting piles of ash beneath her hooves as she departed her hive for the last time.

Revision #1
Created 2024-01-22 15:56:59 UTC by oblivvys
Updated 2024-01-22 15:58:02 UTC by oblivvys