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The Breach

The Breach

by

Alex B.

Dedication: To my Mom and Dad, Irina and Vladimir

Jacob kept the first watch on the towers. He was a tall, fit Arlandrian man in his early thirties with sharp eyes and keen intellect. Since the day that Arlandria had clouded over with Darkness, the men of their small city had been keeping a diligent watch over their borders—fighting back whatever came there way.

When the assault upon the Arlandrian homeland first started, no one within Jacob's city knew what was happening as they were located well inland and protected on each side by the ancient grey mountains. Their peace, however, ended suddenly when the women and the children from beyond the mountains began flooding in through the main gates—seeking refuge from the coming storm.

There were so many refugees and the wounds upon their bodies were vast and cruel. Jacob was a strong man but even he could not stomach the torn and deformed limbs of the guests. It seemed as though the frail were targeted specifically and the young commander often wondered, when he made his rounds in the infirmary, whether they were fighting something less than human.

Those who did not die within the first couple of hours spoke to Jacob and the elders of the horrors they had seen among their own city gates. They spoke of the twilight that had come upon them and of the monsters that came out of it. They spoke of dogs that would come out in the night and drag the men away, of vile things with chains, hooks, and cages who always came for the children. Most importantly, however, they spoke of the Black General—a man in dark clothing that that would always stand on top of the cliff, watching the slaughter unfold in front of him.

At first Jacob tried to determine the identity of the

Black General but it was always to no avail. None of the scouts ever came back.

#

It was Monday again and Jacob kept the night watch. He was looking over the horizon, his heart filled with uncertainty when he heard his name being called from the courtyard below. He looked down and saw his wife, Rachel, standing there. She held a small parcel of food in her hand.

“Jacob” she called to him again “I’ve brought you some food.”

“Go home Rachel” he called down “it is not safe for you here.”

He looked down again in a few minutes and saw that she was stubbornly waiting for him to unlock the door to the tower so that she might take the stairs to come to him.

“I am not letting you up,” he said.

“I will remain here until you do” was her stubborn reply.

He sighed but it was more for show than for annoyance. He signaled to the men around the four watchtowers that he was leaving his post and made his way down the long staircase and to the courtyard below. When he opened the door, she stepped inside. Her golden hair was braided and her blue eyes betrayed signs of both love and exhaustion.

“Rachel, darling,” he said to her, “you should not be doing this.”

“I wanted to spend some time with my husband,” she said as they began to make their way up the stairs “that and you need to relax Jacob. I’m only four months pregnant.”

Jacob let out a sigh but this time it wasn't for show.

“I love you Rachel, and I am worried sick over

you. You heard what those refugees said—what they are doing to the women and the children.”

She turned around and took his hand. The action calmed his spirit a little but his heart continued to be in turmoil. They finally made it up the stairs and cold air filled both of their lungs. Rachel looked down upon the forest.

“It is very black,” she said as she watched the trees stretch out before her. She followed them with her eyes as they went up the hill and into the horizon.

“It *is* very black” he said “ and unsettlingly so. Do you remember it ever being so dark?”

“No” Rachel replied and she could feel him pulling her closer. She leaned her head upon his shoulder and he put his hand over her stomach. She put her fingers over his and squeezed them. There was just so much death around them.

One of the men in the third tower suddenly gave an alarm and it startled Jacob right up. The alarm ran through the night watch and the lights upon the outer walls flared up. Rachel hid herself in one of the doorways etched into the tower and Jacob braced himself for an attack.

When no attack came he looked down below and saw that some of his men had made his way down. Below them and right before the town gates was a party of about twenty men, all in Galandrian uniform. The Arlandrian men waited patiently as Jacob descended down the stairs and into the courtyard below. The men were talking among themselves and when Jacob descended, one of them asked: “What should be done about them?”

“I don’t know,” said Jacob as he looked towards the gates and then towards his wife. She had come out from the room and was now watching her husband below her. He gave her one more concerned look and turned his attention back towards his own men.

“We can use more men” Jacob said.

“And I’m sure they can *use* our food “ said Brian. He was the one that had spoken up originally. “We barely have enough for ourselves.”

“That and they are Galandrian,” said another, “never trusted them or *their prince*.”

“It is your call, Jacob,” said a third.

Jacob thought long and hard. He then told his men to wait there and climbed back to the tower where Rachel was waiting for him.

“Galandrians” he called out to them “why are you

here?”

“We have food!” yelled the man at the head of the small Galandrian battalion. He held up the head of a large boar.

“We have enough of our own food” yelled Brian back, much to the chagrin of Jacob.

“We have intelligence” yelled back the man “we have been to the west of the Mountains. We have seen the Black General.”

“Let them in!” yelled Jacob.

#

Jacob sat around the table watching the Galandrians eat. He looked over to his own men and saw the concern and the distrust in their eyes. The boar that the Galandrians brought in was left untouched.

One of the Galandrian men looked over at Jacob and saw that he was watching them intently. He then wiped his mouth and replied: “What is your name, Arlandrian?”

The table grew quite.

“I am Jacob. I am the highest ranking officer here. And you are, soldier?”

“I am Caleb and this used to be Lieutenant Adrian’s regiment but he got *dark* some time ago so these men are now mine.”

Jacob took the wine and drank it. He saw that Rachel had come in and found a spot with the other women at the end of the hall. Though she did her best to blend in with the dark of the corners, Caleb noticed her. When the Galandrian looked over once more at Jacob, he saw an unwelcoming look in the man’s eye.

“So I take it, she is yours?” said Caleb with a smile as he drank the wine.

“She is.”

“You know they take the women to be their whores?”

Jacob didn’t say anything for a moment and Caleb let the statement sink into the man’s heart.

“The beasts?” said Jacob.

“Yeah, the beasts” answered Caleb. “The ones with the chains and the traps come for the women and for the children. They chain and trap the women and carry them away on caravans, dogs, whatever else they come upon. They take them deep into the mountains, into the bowels of the ground and finally into the Dark Fortress where they breed with them to create the very same perversions that we are fighting....”

The small talk in the corners of the hallway stopped completely.

“How do you know this?”

“I have followed them” said Caleb “and I have seen the Dark Fortress.”

Caleb took another glass of wine. It went down heavy and his eyes darkened from the weight of the memory. “And I have seen the carnage that they leave among the way. I have spoken to some of the women they discarded, after they were through with them...”

“Enough” said Jacob “I think we have all gotten the point.”

Jacob looked over to where Rachel was standing. He could see the whiteness in her hands.

“And the children?” asked Jacob though he wasn’t sure whether he wanted an answer.

“They take them by the wheelbarrows and into the dark fortress as well. And it is not just Arlandrian children. It is Adridarian, Galandrian, Santirian, Marian...”

“So the countries of the North...” began Jacob.

“Have all fallen” finished Caleb “we have found piles of bodies all in different uniform assortments.”

“And what of the East, the West, the South?” exclaimed Rachel from the corner. She was unable to bear it anymore.

“And what is your name?” said Caleb.

“You talk to me. Galandrian,” said Jacob coolly “remember you are guests here.”

“As you wish” said Caleb but not before he gave Rachel one final look.

“We have been across the Southern, Western and Eastern border” continued Caleb “and there is nothing but darkness.”

An anxious murmur went throughout the hall.

“We are all that there is left” said a man sitting next to Caleb. His name was Danny.

Jacob could feel his heart growing sick. “Who is this witch that keeps swallowing these countries?”

The murmuring suddenly went dead.

“We don’t know exactly” said Caleb “but what we do know is that she was once human, just like you and me. And then *something* happened. *Something evil* came inside of her and now IT seeks to devour the whole world.”

“We have seen it” said Danny. Caleb gave him a look but Anthony just shrugged.

“They might as well know what is coming their way. The Marions didn’t. And look what has

happened to them.”

“When they capture you” said Caleb “assuming they don’t take you to breed and eat, they will take you down to the working fields. There the beasts with the whips and the chains hold you down and make you drink a black water. If you don’t drink it, they break your body but if you do---everything begins to change. Whatever is inside this Dark Queen enters you and begins to transform your spirit. You forget who you were and remember nothing but your allegiance to your new masters. And over time, this sickness begins to corrupt your body as well and you begin to resemble the very same beasts you started fighting. Long jaws, arms, and all.”

“How...” started Jacob.

“Because John Nathaniel De Este has been taken,” said Caleb “and he now heads the Dark army. *Our* prince and *once* fearless leader is now the Black General.”

The words were like a punch to Jacob’s stomach and it was so strong that he did not hear the wailing of the women at first.

“Looks like they know of John’s skill even in this remote shit hall.”

“Know of him?” said Joshua “he was the last commander putting up a fight with the witch. He was everybody’s last hope...”

“Well everybody’s last hope tried to get us to convert” said Caleb “but the few of us here managed to escape before we entered the confines of the castle. Danny here escaped right from under John’s nose.”

“So all is lost” said Jacob quietly to himself but Caleb and the rest of the men heard him.

“All is lost” said Caleb “especially with John in charge of the Dark Army now. He is responsible for all the mutilations and atrocities. It is his responsibility to collect as many men, women, and children as he can and bring them back to the fortress to serve the witch-queen, Isabella.”

“And he is the reason that your king is dead and the Darkness entered Arlandria” added Danny.

Rachel turned around and walked outside. She stood there for a little bit until she could hear footsteps behind her. She turned her head and saw that Jacob had come up beside her. She could tell that he also was upset and she reached out her hand and touched him. He looked at her and even in the night around them, she could see how red his eyes

were.

“We will make it out of here, Jacob” she said to him “I do not care what these swine say.”

He didn't say anything, he just took her hand into his and held onto it tightly. He stood next to her for a long time but he did not look at her. She, however, never took her eyes off her husband.

“Come on Rachel” he said to her quietly “I will take you home.”

“And where will you go?”

“Come on darling. Just come on. Don't look back, darling, the elders will handle the accommodations for these men.” He took her hand and led her on through the dark streets of their little, barricaded town.

As Rachel walked on, she would run her hand upon the walls. She had lived here all her life and had taken this same route home countless times before. When she was a little girl she would play alongside these stones and her heart would laugh. But now, as she walked them once more, her heart grew weary and she tripped over the very same crevices that she played on all her life.

When Jacob saw that she was hurt, he pulled her closer to him and when he saw that despair had taken hold of her—he carried her the last couple of feet home. He placed her down gently on their porch and opened the door to their small, concrete home. He then carried her back in and laid her down upon the bed. He lay down besides her, taking her into his arms.

“We will be all right love,” he said to her now as he could feel her body shaking from the tears “I will let no harm come upon you—I promise.”

She continued to cry but when she calmed a little, Rachel replied: “Where are we to go Jacob? This darkness is everywhere.”

“We will go towards Adridaria. Surely, we would have heard if the capitol was taken.”

“And then what?”

“I don't know.”

She felt him move away from her and saw him sit up.

“Where are you going?” she replied, with her eyes suddenly glistening.

“I have to finish the night watch.”

“Finish the night watch?! For what purpose Jacob?”

“For my own peace of mind Rachel. I've been doing this since the war started and I cannot stop

now.”

He turned around and tried to kiss her but she had pulled away from him. His eyes filled with both pain and tears. He got up fast and was about to leave when she came for him. She wrapped her hands around him and kissed the back of his neck.

“I love you Jacob,” she said to him and this time he kissed her. He then kissed her stomach and replied: “stay inside. As soon as I wrap my head around what is to be done, I will come for you. Do not open the door for anyone but me.”

She nodded and kissed him on the forehead. He then stepped outside and closed it behind him. The air around him was cold and heavy; As Jacob walked down the small alleys he began to feel very uncomfortable. He had walked this way since he was eleven years old and Rachel was twelve but something was different about alley tonight. He could not understand what it was but the very hairs on the back of his neck stood up.

Jacob drew his sword and he stood there silently, listening to any sound upon the pavement. When he couldn't hear anything, he continued forward until he reached a small square. It was a square in the middle of the town and it led to four separate alleyways.

In the middle was a fountain and all around it were benches, plants and a few abandoned toys. Jacob stopped by the fountain and waited again, his mind going to the alleyways surrounding him. As he stood there, he felt an uneasiness come upon him. As his eyes trailed to one of the alleyways he suddenly saw a pair of red eyes glaring at him.

The wolf did not give Jacob much time as it came for him, pinning him down and reaching for his head. The animal would have succeeded in biting the man's face if not for a sudden sting of a cool blade opening his side. The wolf jumped back a few feet, growling angrily at his not-so willing prey.

Jacob sat up painfully with his eyes constantly on the wolf before him. All around them the alarms screamed and the man could hear shouts in the distance that the city walls had been breached.

Jacob got himself up, his heart beating rapidly in his chest. His thoughts went back and forth between the beast before him and Rachel. At that moment the wolf smiled and launched once more, but Jacob's sword flashed and the beast fell upon the ground, crying severely from the pain. Jacob stepped upon the severed paw as he began to slowly advance

towards with a sword in his hand.

Jacob's attack was suddenly interrupted by female screams and thoughts of Rachel and the baby entered his head once more. He gave the wounded beast one more final, disgusted look and headed back.

As the Arlandrian ran down the street, sword in hand, one of the windows flew upon and a half-eaten human body fell out. Jacob put his arm to his mouth and slowly stepped over it--listening constantly to the growls and the screams inside the house. All around him were demon soldiers and he fought them off as best as he could, trying feverishly to reach his house. When he reached his own steps, however, his heart fell and his stomach dropped. From where he stood, he could see that the front door was ajar and that there were claw marks all over the front doors.

Jacob entered slowly, his back pressed against the wall and his sword gleaming from the dim light coming in through the windows. His table was destroyed and there were brown-colored stains on the walls.

"Rachel" he said quietly and listened. There was no response.

"Rachel" he said again and his heart despaired. He sunk to the floor and put one of his hands to his face. He could feel himself crying.

"Jacob" said a quiet voice and he was up to his feet. He looked around and saw a pile of clothes behind the sofa. He then saw a piece of braided golden hair. He ran to the pile and pulled her out from underneath it. She was bruised, terrified but unharmed. He held her close to him, kissed her and said: "What has happened?"

She then pointed to the dark mass lying in the doorway of the living room and the kitchen. Jacob let go of her and went over to the creature. He could see a gash in its belly.

"I did that," said Rachel as she stood up "it came through the door."

"Good girl" answered her husband. His attention was then diverted to the screams and the growls outside. He locked the door and turned towards her, his eyes full of terror.

"They are all over the town" he said, "the walls have given way."

"How could that have happened?"

"I do not know" he said apologetically.

She placed her hand over her belly as they heard crashing outside. He then took her hand and they

headed out the back, Jacob constantly watching the surroundings. They moved quickly but cautiously through the streets and Rachel held onto his hand in a way she had never done before.

"Where are we going Jacob?" she said to him he pressed her against one of the walls.

"We are going to Adridaria."

"Adridaria?" she said with her eyes filling with tears "it is a four days ride and we don't even have horses...."

"Do you want to stay here?" He asked frustrated. Before she could answer, he pushed into one of the narrow alleys in between the houses. He put his hand over her mouth to prevent her from screaming as one of creatures appeared upon the road. His skin was full of boils and he was dragging chains behind him. At the end of the chains were human bodies and some were still living. They cried out from the pain and torture, and Jacob recognized some of his own men among the prisoners.

He then looked towards the distance and saw that the front gates were wide open and that the beasts were just piling in. He then noticed a figure upon the right wall, guiding the demons in.

"That piece of—" said Jacob as he watched Caleb direct the wolves towards the main square. "You let them in!" He then said more to himself than anyone else: "And I let you in."

When the beast with the chains passed by, Jacob looked away for at that moment, not sure if his stomach could bear the thought that he might be responsible for his city's massacre.

Jacob looked back at Rachel and he could see the answer to his question in her eyes. After seeing Caleb on the wall she was willing to brave anything to get out of this place.

Jacob quietly listened for any more movement and when he heard none, he and his wife made their way across a small back street and towards one of the outer walls surrounding the city.

"Some of these walls have hidden doors in them" said Jacob as he felt the stones with his hand "some of men in the watch used them to get in and out of the city secretly." Within a couple of minutes Jacob found a door and opened it. He then led his wife through it. "Pretty much, they used these doors to sneak out and spend time with their lovers."

He then looked at Rachel and quickly "I just know about it."

She laughed painfully and replied: "Of all the

things to assure me at this moment!”

Jacob realized that she was right. When he first joined the night watch, the debauchery that the other men engaged in used to horrify him. Now it all seemed to him so completely surreal.

Within minutes, they stepped out of the wall and into the dark forest surrounding their small city. As they continued on, Rachel turned around to give one more look to the place that she had spent her whole life in. It was burning and the horror of the flames was masked only by the gut wrenching screams of woman and children being devoured by the beasts within the city gates.

Jacob saw the look on her face and pulled her out of her trance—had he not done so, she probably would have fainted.

“Come, Rachel,” he said to her and they continued in the cold and darkness before them. Neither one of them knew where they were going but Jacob led on, despite the turmoil and the uncertainty in his own heart. It was almost dawn when they suddenly came upon a ravine. At the very edge of it stood a man dressed in black and he smiled as he looked upon the Arlandrian city burning before him.

“Oh no” said Jacob but it was too late and he felt himself brought to the floor by the pull of a whip. Both of his hands were bound instantly and two enforcers stood by him, each holding unto one end of the whip. Jacob couldn’t move his head because his neck was so bound but from the corner of his eye he could see the two large dogs guard Rachel as she sat on the floor, her body convulsing from fear. Next to the dogs and with his eyes fixed upon his wife was the most vile creature that Jacob had ever seen. It was neither beast nor man but a sad perversion of what it once was.

“She is with child,” said the *perversion* as the

Galandrian Prince came over to examine the prisoners. “It is a marvelous bounty. The Dark Queen will be pleased like no other.”

“At ease, Rochelle“ said the Prince, but the beast kept his eyes on Rachel.

“We will wait until the child is born,” continued the beast, “ and then he will be ground into the finest meat. And she will serve our soldiers like the rest of the women.”

Rochelle then reached out to touch Rachel but John grabbed him by his neck and brought him to the floor.

“You do not touch,” said John as Rochelle gasped for air “ without my permission.”

He then let go of the beasts and Rochelle pulled away, his whole body hurting from John’s grip. John looked over at Jacob and could see the tears coming down his face. He then looked over at the enforcers and in their eyes and their grins he could see the plans that they had for the woman.

John then took out his dagger and with one swift motion cut Rachel’s throat. She fell to the ground and had not one of the enforcers pounded him on the mouth, Jacob would not have stopped screaming.

“Enough” said John, as Jacob did nothing but cough up blood and cry from the loss and pain “take him with the rest.”

The enforcers did as they were told though one let out a very disappointed sigh as they passed by Rachel’s body.

“You should not have done that,” Rochelle hissed in the distance. “The Dark Queen will not be pleased.”

“I don’t care” answered John “she has had enough children to eat.”

He then turned his attention to the burning city before him.