



Vincent Lakes

An Amorphous Fear

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by

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Amidst the shapeless shadows, he tried to sneak forward as quietly as he could. Strange, sharp-edged mounds surrounded him everywhere, and he could feel the presence of his nemesis, almost smelling his foul breath or catching a glimpse of his agile figure, but he was unable to focus on anything true. A slight stir in the blackness, the almost unnoticeable change in the draft, signs that might warn him about the lurking dread in case he would be discovered. How many seconds such a hint would give him? Less than one, most likely, and yet it might be enough to save his life, like so many times before.

Blood rushed in his veins, paced by his wildly beating heart. His sweating hands grasped the hilt of the sword like it was the last string that separated him from death. But he saw nothing – just ghastly dance of the shadows that disappeared instantly when he blinked, delusions created by his strained mind. He had to find a way to stop it or his enemy would gain the upper hand in this pressing and harrowing battle. A nervous warrior was a dead warrior – nothing more. He knew it, and his enemy knew it as well. This battle was as much about wits as it was of swords.

“I have stayed here for too long,” he muttered, and his voice shivered from fear he would never admit to himself. He had given too much time for his enemy to determine his precise location, and it was merely a matter of time before the assault would hurl from the darkness. If he could not gain the control of his disordered thoughts, the chances for surviving were less than poor.

“I have to move,” he repeated over and over again in his head, forming the words with his mouth without making a sound. The silence was overwhelming, and even the slightest rustle would echo over great distances, and he could not know if the barely audible whisper or a clang that occasionally occurred was a rat or some other animal, or if it was that loathsome man sneaking up on him. He was the hunted, the prey waiting to be caught and slaughtered, and somehow he had to find a way to reverse that situation.

Then, after seconds of hesitation that felt like eternity, he finally sallied forth, crawling across the ground, avoiding dead ends and vales that seemed like obvious places to arrange an ambush. He had to find his enemy, find a way to sneak behind him and take him by surprise. Unable to hear anything because of his own exhausted breathing, he advanced from one deep shadow to another. There

was no time to dawdle or rest. Once he had managed to conquer his fear for the time being and convinced his feet to move again, he could not stop until he was sure of what he was going to do, for he was afraid that his gawky knees might not be as cooperative next time. But to achieve the knowledge of available options, he had to discover the exact location of his enemy and find out what he was planning before he had the chance to fulfill his malevolent attempts.

The fear of unknown and unexpected had an almost paralyzing effect on him, strangling his heart and numbing his limbs until they were nearly immobile, which continued to feed his anxiety even further. And even once he had successfully crossed the threshold of activating his muscles again, dashing and leaping forward in short bursts like hungry leopard, a certain kind of clumsy stiffness lingered in his body, a symptom of deep, primal fear that even the rush of the action could not suppress.

One careless move, an inconsiderate surge, and something that looked like a blob that was going to swallow him with a single bite came crumbling down from the top of the mound. Unaware of what exactly it was, he leaped to the side, evading the unknown object with relative ease. But as the amorphous bundle hit the ground, escorted by a terrifying crash that felt like it would crack the very air as it exploded in the silence, he did the one thing he should not have done – he stopped. His fiercely beating heart and his panicky brain were tearing him in all available directions, but his body was frozen still like it was suddenly drowned in a quagmire. A distant drum-like noise began to pound in his ears, and he was certain it was his enemy finally coming for him. In his current state, he would be completely defenseless against the attack.

Somehow he managed to stumble across the small clearing, desperately seeking shelter from the forthcoming fray. At least he was out of the immediate sight, hidden behind the mounds around the clearing. If he could calm down his nerves enough, he might have a chance to turn this game around for his own advantage. The enemy should be coming his way by now, unless of course, he had smelled a trap and was purposely avoiding the direction of the sound. The uncertainty crawled back, pushing away the short moment of clarity and courage. The fear for his own hide returned, even stronger than before, urging him to do something imprudent. Thoughts racing, hands shaking, choking slowly in his own indecisiveness, he continued to battle against himself, listening and watching everything he could not hear or see. There was only that horrendous rumble, like approaching steps of a giant that caused a small quake every time the enormous feet trampled upon the ground. Sudden flashes around him, glimpses of someone in the dark, sounds he thought he heard only to find out it was his own mind

playing tricks on him. The only real thing he was able to rely on was the stomping of the giant. The noise was becoming louder and louder, until it felt like the abhorrent thing was just behind the stifling veil of darkness.

Then it stopped - everything stopped. The time itself seemed to stall for a moment, and a most oppressive and overwhelming silence fell upon the gloom. Even the rats halted their rustling noise as the dreadful stillness took over. Then, like a grating scream, an unnaturally loud creak pierced the dusty air as a soft light suddenly cut the darkness in half. A door opened just few steps away from him, emerging from the shadows like a light of divine intervention, then the head of the stomping giant appeared, peeking far across the room. Her long hair was like silvery silk, and her face had a touch of kindness on it, but in her eyes she had a glare, cold as steel.

“Gildan? Bereth? What are you boys doing up here?” she insisted to know, and her gentle lips turned from warm and full arch into sullen frown as she glanced at the dusty mounds.

“We're just playing, Mom,” Gildan replied innocently.

“Well then, what was that awful noise?” she demanded more information.

“Oh, I think I pushed some old dish off the table or something. I think it was one of those that were stored away last year. I'm really sorry.” Gildan seemed genuinely repentant, for he did not want to upset his mother on purpose.

“I suppose it's all right,” she gushed. “I was afraid that you got hurt, but where is your brother?”

“Come out, Bereth, the game is over for now,” Gildan called out.

Another young boy climbed out from behind the mounds that turned out to be different types of abandoned furniture stored under heavy sheets, pushed to the attic where they were out of the way.

“I would've caught you soon anyway,” he said, laughing mischievously, his thick, messy hair sticking out after creeping under the furniture.

“Never!” Gildan exclaimed, but their mother interrupted the argument before it even began.

“Stop it now!” she snapped, clearly upset by their wild behavior. “Dinner is served downstairs and you children are to wash up and join us before it's time for bed.”

“Yes, Mom,” Bereth complied.

“Leave your sword here, Bereth,” Gildan urged. “We can continue tomorrow from where we left off.”

His brother smiled at him. “Great idea,” he answered, causing the stomping giant to sigh quietly

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as she led them away from the dark attic. Two wooden swords were left lying on the floor; there they would wait to be picked up again and taken to another adventure among the sinister gloom of distressing fears, mysterious shadows and dusty, old furniture that had no other use but to work as building blocks for a labyrinth of imagination.