

Blood on the Lilacs

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Part I

The Beginning of Light

Chapter 1

Peace and Cooperation

The sun rose, making the snow covering on the ground glitter in its reddish morning radiance. What few birds remained made themselves heard in calls to one another. The yurts of the nearby camp blocked the wind, which was off on its way to who knows where.

Today would be a day that would have a profound effect on all of history.

In the center yurt, a face peeked out of the doorway, an unmistakable face. Brown hair, hanging in front of yellow eyes set in reddish fur, looking down a moderate snout; the unmistakable features of a gnoll. Indeed, a chieftain, as the headress and golden jewelry adorning his clothes would attest to as the rest of him stepped out of his yurt.

Today, most of the tribe would travel to the east. All around the able bodied warriors and the wise elders got ready to make the trip. Among those preparing for the ride was the chieftain's wife, a pinnacle of beauty amongst the gnolls, unique in having black hair rather than the nut brown that was common. Her child, five months old and talking, was following, almost the spitting image of her mother save for the hair, which was dark brown.

"Mama, where are we going today?" the child asked in the gnoll tongue, the innocence in her eyes glimmering.

The chieftain's wife looked down at her daughter and smiled. "My child, today we go to meet the humans to the east."

"Oh? Why?"

The mother went back to preparing the horse. "There is much good hunting ground near their settlement. We wish to seek their permission to hunt there. It is important we do this, so as to make friends with them."

The child smiled a beaming smile. "We go to make new friends? Good!" she clapped her hands in joy. "Maybe there will be human children there! I wonder what games they play?"

The chieftain's wife smiled. "We'll see."

The child ran off to play with the older children before she left. As the mother watched, her smile faded. She looked off into the distance, deep in thought. The chieftain, his horse ready, placed a paw on his wife's shoulders.

“My beloved, what troubles you?”

The chieftain’s wife turned to look into her husband’s eyes. “I worry about this meeting. Are you certain we will be able to talk to the humans about this? And do you think it will be good to take our daughter along?”

The chieftain smiled, caressing his wife’s face with his other paw. “Oh, loved one, you worry too much. I have assurances that the humans here are peaceful and trade with many peoples. I am sure they will hear us out.”

“But what of our child, my mate? Will she be safe with us?”

“No harm will come to her. I am certain. And it will be a good experience. Diplomacy is very important for the child who will lead this tribe when my time is done.”

The chieftain’s wife sighed in relief. The two embraced, shared a quick nuzzle, and brought their ready horses about. The mother helped her child into the special saddle, a gift from a talented weaver that allowed the mother to ride with her child anywhere. Soon, the greater portion of the tribe were on horses, ready for the journey ahead.

At last, the chieftain turned his horse to face the rest of the caravan. “My people! We go to meet the humans! Let us ride forth for a new time of peace and cooperation!” And with this, thirty horses galloped forth into the snow-covered plains.

The chieftain’s child held onto her mother from behind as they rode, just behind and to the right of the chieftain. Snow covered trees sparsely dotted the landscape all around them.

After much riding, the town came into view on the distant horizon, houses covered in snow.

“Look, little one,” the chieftain’s wife said to her daughter, “we have almost arrived. Do you see the houses?”

“Yes, Mama. Do you see the people there? Are they here to greet us?”

Before the chieftain’s wife could respond, there was a great flash and a sound like a thunderclap, followed by the agonized screams of the gnolls closest to the source of it all. A great wind, a massive heat ripped its way through the gnoll caravan. The daughter watched, her young eyes filled with fear, as the world spun around her while she fell off the horse. She saw another gnoll burst into flames, another with most of the flesh melting off. Then she and her parents were hit by the percussive force. Before her eyes, her mother and father were ripped to shreds, their blood evaporating as it flew in spurts into the air. She herself was hit very badly, though her mother’s body took most of the force of the impact.

As the mysterious force ceased, and all went silent, the gnoll child lay there, in the remains of her parents, crying weakly. She couldn’t even stand. Her parents, her relatives, friends, everyone she knew and loved was gone now. She

cried, her lungs weak from breathing ash that had once been the gnolls in the front lines.

Time passed. Some humans, speaking a tongue she'd never heard nor understood, made their approach. They moved the body that had once been the cheiftain's wife, and the daughter saw their faces, horrid and flat, furless. What's more, she saw in their eyes a look of hatred. Then another one came, wearing robes, arguing with the others. This human bent down close to the young gnoll. Fear sang in her heart as this human bent down to take a closer look. In this one's eyes was a look of sadness and weariness. The human in robes picked her up, shouted some more at the other humans, and walked away from the horrid scene, the young gnoll in his arms.