



Final Stand

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HIS FIST CONNECTED WITH MY JAW. I DIDN'T EVEN SEE IT COMING. I felt nothing and everything; the punch happened so fast I didn't feel it, but I knew where all four of his knuckles hit, from just under my nose to the bottom of my jaw. I tried to roll with the punch, pursed my lips for extra protection, but he knocked two of my teeth out anyway.

I hit the ground hard, shoulder first. I spat out my teeth with a glob of blood; swallowing them would be the only way to make this situation worse. Throbbing ruptures of electricity pulsed from the newly emptied sockets through my skull to my right eye. It watered uncontrollably. I knew this was going to hurt, but dear God!

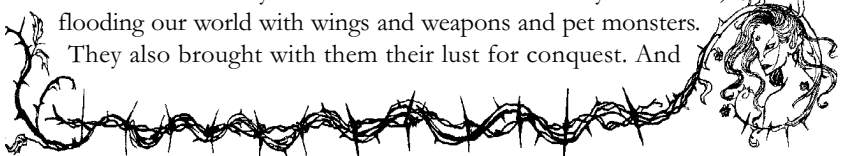
Cheering. I heard the crowd chant his name. Well, two thirds of the crowd, anyway. Luckily, his hubris distracted him from me, forcing him to laugh and wave at his fans. I'd take any time I could to catch my breath. Prepare myself for the next punch. Think of my son and daughter.

My boy was only three, my girl just one year old, when they came. Those winged devils, death-bringers of hatred. The Fae. The Faeries. The war lasted four years, consumed all of Earth, and left humanity completely enslaved.

I remembered that day with the same vividness of a knee-shaking vomit. My daughter's first birthday. I held her in my arms, soaking in every moment, every giggle, every smell. The personification of love. Then they attacked.

I learned that day other dimensions were real, because that was where the Fae came from. They tore a hole between our reality and theirs, flooding our world with wings and weapons and pet monsters.

They also brought with them their lust for conquest. And



none liked to do so more than Akilay, their greatest warrior, the one who just punched me in the face.

Taking enough time to collect my thoughts, I stood. If only I had a better plan! The surrounding crowd displayed mixed reactions. Many laughed and whooped, most cheered and chanted Akilay's name. Not the humans, though. I heard their silence. Twenty thousand still tongues. Their closed lips cried out with hopelessness, ground down into submission, feeling like nothing more than crushed sand on a scorched beach. They had seen this before and knew very well what the outcome would be.

I held my fists in front of my face, classic boxing style, but little good that did. With buzzing wings, Akilay flew to me like a missile. His left fist connected with my gut, forcing all the air out of my lungs. Doing a midair pirouette, he backhanded my head with the force of a runaway train. My neck hurt from just trying to keep my skull attached to my body. I writhed on the ground, my body spasming from trying to remember how to breathe while doing anything to get away from my attacker. Blurry vision and the taste of blood consumed my world. The same way the Fae consumed Earth.

Confident and by surprise, they appeared from nowhere, attacked all parts of the globe, and disappeared. They did this every day for the first year, weakening all militaries the world over each time. The good news was world peace resulted. The bad news was the limited time to celebrate it. The greatest scientific and military minds collaborated in trying to find the doorways to their world, predict where they would appear next, or create one of our own. Again, that was all for naught. When the Fae opened the doorways one final time, we had nothing left. And they were just getting started.

Dragons blotted out the skies like sticky ash from angry volcanoes. No airplane or helicopter stood a chance; they simply cracked and discarded them like broken toys. The heaviest tanks from every corner of the Earth were ground under the thunderous heels of trolls. The sick beasts laughed with each twist of metal. Monsters with snapping jaws and slicing claws roamed the lands, invading every country no matter how sparse the population, stopping for nothing other than their masters' commands. And their masters commanded them to stop very infrequently. We had speed and dexterity, but they had numbers. Endless numbers.

We resembled them without wings, making us one rung lower on the evolutionary ladder, and they enjoyed celebrating that fact, mocking us for not being quite perfect, and sodomizing our souls for their pleasures. Men sturdy enough to stand fought for their amusement while those who couldn't joined the children and elderly enduring back-breaking labor, while women...women had it worse, reduced to meat, playthings at best.

The Fae stayed in our world to push our faces in the dirt with their heels not only because our suffering amused them, but because they had been here before. And they wanted revenge. The stories, the books and tales, movies and whatever form of media spun a yarn about faeries were true. All true. The Fae invaded us before, thousands of years prior. Yet somehow we repelled them, shoved them