

# Life's Blood

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The death of a warrior can be tragic, but it is also expected. The death of a cleric is a sin, for they devote their lives to something greater than themselves. They devote their lives to be with the essence of the world; to be one with peace or freedom, with their beliefs.

A cool breeze lifted the red and yellow leaves off of the merchant's road. Dancing through the air the leaves fluttered across the path, relishing the brief flight they had while the wind lasted. They flew for several more moments, floating, twirling, before their corkscrew finally deposited them in the red brown dirt paving the path. Slowly the breeze picked up again and more leaves rose off of the ground with a faint crinkle. Before the leaves could raise more than a few inches off of the ground their cheerful dance was interrupted by a tall figure sprinting down the path.

"Sara, please... listen to me," Cried out a male voice, melodramatically forlorn, "You know that I can't keep up with you when you do that. How can I protect you when you are so far away?"

"Protect me?" The young woman called back, with an exaggerated chuckle, "I don't need protection from anyone, and least of all you, my brother! You can't protect a thing anymore."

"But where is your sword Sis? You can't protect yourself without that." He called back.

"You know that this is all that's left," She answered, tapping the shattered hilt of a blade that was at her side. Her voice grew louder as she widened the gap between them, "Until I can get this repaired I don't have a Sword, but all that I'll need to protect myself is the dagger in my pack. Besides the last military post we passed swore that this road was safe."

"Better safe than sorry sis, you should be more careful. Why is the dagger in your pack?" Liam raised an eyebrow.

"I lost the side sheath for it that's why!" She grinned over her shoulder at him, "Don't worry, I'll be fine!"

"Famous last words," he called back.

With a long luxurious laugh she continued her run, enjoying the fading sunlight of the past day. Her long blond hair flowed behind her, catching the autumn light and holding the fiery warmth within its long silky strands. Dressed in forest greens and browns, the deep full colors complimented her sun dark skin.

Following behind at a slower, more leisurely pace was her brother. Calmly he walked, his pale white robes gently sweeping around his legs; her brother had a kind face, a martyrs' face many had said. As she was beautiful he was handsome, although neither held much thought for their looks. Where she had a deep tan he was pale, as though he had not stepped outdoors in several months.

Frowning he watched as Sara disappeared off the path, jumping through an opening in the wall of vegetation. After a brief moment she reappeared, gesturing for him to hurry up.

"Get over here Liam," Sara called out, sounding full of breath and spirited, as if she had been walking with him instead of running, "I think we can stop up here for the night, there is a small clearing a little ways off the path."

"Alright, sounds good," he called back with a small chuckle, "Don't get into trouble before I get there."

She laughed again as she turned off the path once more, a heart lifting laugh full of warmth and humor, "I think I can keep myself out of trouble for a little while longer. At least until you get here my brother."

Liam grinned at her jest although he knew she could not see his appreciation. It was good to hear her laugh again he thought; very good. Through the falling beams of golden light he slowly picked up his pace.

Sara whistled while she worked, it was a lively tune, one that her mother had always hummed when she was still alive. The song brought back fond memories. After finding enough rocks to line the fire, and filling her water skin, Sara knelt down to search through her pack. She unbuckled the scabbard that housed her broken sword and lay it alongside her bag. The satchel had been through much with her, and now it carried all of her worldly possessions.

"I'm glad to see that sometime along that wild run of yours you gained some faith," Liam said, once again adopting his forlorn tone, "I remember when I spent much of my time in prayer, searching for the truth, the light."

"Lighten up Liam," Sara laughed, continuing to unpack the supplies for her end of day meal, "I'm a warrior, a soldier, I have faith even if I don't show it all of the time. Generally it is faith in my blade or in my friends and comrades, but it is faith just the same. Although, now that you mention it, I don't believe that I've seen you deep in prayer for a while now."

"Ha-ha very funny," he stated dryly, "I think that being dead, I am now closer to my god than I ever have been. I think that is reason enough to not pray. I am in constant communication with the great forces, and furthermore I am at peace."

"True enough," Sara agreed, and then in a sigh, "true enough. I wish that I could have saved you Liam. I wish that I'd been able to keep you alive."

Liam turned towards her, sorrow in his eyes, and murmured, "As do I Sara, as do I. But being as I am, I will be able to help you the best I can for all eternity."

Sara started to work on the fire as Liam lowered himself on to his haunches and settled into the position. Silence filled the air as they fell into their thoughts. Slowly the sun sank towards the far off mountains.

The sun had sank, its edge touching the horizon, when the rasp of steel on steel woke them from their thoughts. A cool voice sliced through their campsite as a heavysset man strode off the path and through the woods towards their clearing, his steel blade stretched before him.

"Stand slowly and leave your hands where I can see them," the man said smoothly as he moved within reach of them.

"Get out of here," Liam ordered, "I may be a man of peace, but I will fight you if I must."

The man only laughed, "You're nothing more than a dead boy, young one," the man idly swung his blade through Liam's fleshless torso, "and your pretty friend?" Sara bared her teeth, "I'll kill her while you watch... after a while. Although... I am curious, how did you come back after your death?"

"In my brief life I served as a cleric, a healer. I lived in peace, my only goal to save lives, until my own life was cut short by bandits, men not so unlike yourself," The man laughed and Liam scowled then continued angrily, "My life was well lived and in death my only regret was that I would not spend enough time with my family, my sister. My service was rewarded, I was allowed back so that I could be with my remaining family."

"You are a fool then," the man laughed, "The only reason to live is to gain wealth and power, to be the strongest you can be. You two, well you at least," he nodded mockingly at Sara, still pointing his sword at her neck, "may not have much, but I have fallen on hard times recently and need food. I will take your supplies and then kill you both. I hate leaving loose ends."

"I will not let you hurt Sara," Liam stated, pale eyes staring intently at the man.

"How would you stop me?" The man laughed.

"No Liam, I won't let him kill me." Sara growled, "He will fall to my blade."

Liam looked at his sister, his eyes wide, but he nodded, "Yes of course. I only wish I could help. Just... stay alive, for me. You have much in your future."

"Your sister won't manage that, dead boy, she doesn't stand a chance."

Confidently, Sara pulled a long dagger from her satchel and started to circle the man slowly, ready to stab, to kill. But Liam could see that with the longer blade he had the advantage, with a proper weapon she could have easily held her own. As it was, with she didn't stand a chance. The moment she stepped with his reach he bashed the knife from her grasp with the broad side of his blade. Sara dove off to the side, out of the path of his next stroke and towards the dagger, but it had flown too far. The

brute crushed her leg into the ground as she tried to lunge once again towards her blade, stopping her with the knife just inches from her grasp. Roaring with laughter the brute raised his sword. Slowly he began to draw back his arm, get ready for one powerful swing.

“Sara!” Liam cried out, running in front of the man, into the swing of his blade, knowing that it would be no use, he turned his face to the heavens and called, “Soon after I died you let me come back, so I could keep my sister company, give her support to find her path. I ask one more favor! Let me save her!”

The wind picked up and rustled through the leaves. It is done a mighty voice stated, and Liam felt life flow through him, felt his form solidify. Just in time to stop the oncoming blow. Liam screamed as his newfound body felt pain again, and he lashed out with his already dying fists, knocking the man back. As the pressure on her foot loosened Sara lunged again for the knife, this time she reached it. Leaping to her feet, she raced to the still stunned man and dispatched him. As the man’s body fell so did Liam’s nearly empty husk.

She quickly knelt and raised Liam’s head off the ground; faintly she heard him murmur, “thank you for granting my request,” And then his head slumped and his eyes clouded and fell sightless to the ground.

“You’ll be back won’t you?” And after receiving no reply, she tried again, “Liam? Liam...”

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