

Running Blind

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Once this story gets started, I'll put up a better description.

[just a warning: the prologue won't make much sense right now]

[another warning: this will be a long story]

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She wrapped the cloak tighter, straining to see anything through the snow that whipped around her, biting at any exposed skin. A high screech floated through the whirling white mass that hindered her escape. A haunting call answered, closer. They were surrounding her, slowly working their way to her. She would not be deterred by such thoughts, though, and trudged on through the ever-thickening snow. There was a faint flicker up ahead. She squinted and stepped toward the slight light. Three more steps and the storm died away instantly.

Startled at the silence, she looked back at the snow swirling feet away, then the flakes suspended inches in front of her. One settled lightly on her nose, then melted, creating a little rivulet that ran down to the tip before dropping to the ground. She looked around: the cave she found herself in was melted and molded by the lava of a long-dormant volcano, though now this place was anything but the fiery inferno it had once been. The fire crackled and a piece of wood collapsed, sending up sparks. A figure sat over the fire, tending to its wavering form. Looking up at his visitor, he rose. Although barely 5 feet, he towered over the newcomer. His eyes scanned her, not missing a single tear of the cloth or scratch of the skin. Physical appearance accounted for, he locked eyes with her, daring her to look away. Brown and scared blue gazed at each other until a bloodcurdling screech resounded around the pair and echoed further in the cave. The becloaked creature whipped around to stare in horror at the two figures that seemed to materialize right out of the blizzard. The one screeched again, long and hard, making her double over and grip her head. The other stepped toward the prone figure, giving out a satisfied growl. Neither of the two seemed to notice the one who had been in the cave first, though he was already moving.

He thrust his hand forward and one of the attackers squawked and fell to the ground with a clatter. The other jerked its head and gave a deep growl that rose into a bone-rattling howl. The noise bounced around in the cavernous space, making the one in a cloak tremble where she was on the ground. Eyes glowing, the defender trust his hand at the other creature and made a slashing motion. A purplish-pink light sliced through the air, catching the creature on the shoulder and across the chest. It gave a surprised whine as it was propelled backwards and into the raging snow beyond the mouth of the cave. Quickly he grabbed his sack that was lying near the wavering fire he had been tending to but a few short minutes ago. He went over to the creature still curled up on the ground and grabbed her gently by the shoulder. While helping her get up, he checked for any more attackers. With none conscious in the immediate vicinity, he made for the mouth of the cave, the other following him closely.

She shivered and pulled her cloak tighter around herself while wondering if the stranger who led her felt the cold of the snow that was driven at them mercilessly by the screaming wind. They trudged on for what seemed like hours through the ever-shifting snow drifts. Just when she thought she could walk no more, the wind died and the snow fell lightly to the ground. The air was still chilled, and instead of cavern walls, tall evergreens towered over the pair, blocking the wind. They crunched on, an eerie silence cloaking the entire forest. Above them, a branch laden with snow collapsed, dumping the load onto the two creatures below.

What fell on her sizzled and evaporated almost instantly. The other looked at her strangely and brushed the snow off of him. He swept his gaze over the area, searching for a place to rest. Not far away was a fallen tree stuck in the crook of another tree. He grabbed some scattered limbs and built up a lean-to shelter in. Laying some more branches under the shelter, he effectively made an insulated bed. He had her sit on the bed while he cleared away a spot for the fire. Soon there were steady flames licking up at the frigid twilight air and casting a soft glow in the immediate vicinity. He took up watch so she could rest after their flight from the cave. The crackle of the fire and its mesmerizing dance lulled her into a shallow, restive sleep.