

Shan d'all followed his master as he stumbled back to his tent. The King of All Flies may have blessed his champion with incredible resilience to the wounds of the flesh, but after two mugs of fermented dryad sap the great and mighty Ser Baldaflax was as clumsy as a newly spawned Slime Hound.

"And that's when I saw her," the lord of plagues slurred as he tripped over his own feet again, nearly falling face first to the earth. "the Hamadrithal, the she-wretch of the woods. Bloody Hammer of the Radiant Queen herself, aye, she had come for me and me alone."

He always told this story when he fell into his cups, regardless of if anyone cared to hear it, or even were around to hear it at all. Always he recounted the final battle for the soul of Teselli Alari and the mighty tree Hyperion. Shan d'all wondered if the gaze of Drycha haunted his master as it did him. Surely not.

"She looked on me and upon my works and knew that the beautiful putrescence I had wrought was as irreversible as it had been inevitable, that her tree had become Grandfather's forever more. Oh how she howled."

Shan'dall shuddered as the echoing memory of that shriek filled his mind once more, as it had done countless times before. That ear bursting scream of purest rage and deepest anguish. Shan d'all looked to the trees, instinctively scanning them for Drycha's predatory gaze.

"Oh she was angry all right, that one, a fierce beastie indeed."

Ser Baldaflax stopped and swayed where he stood. Arms waving sluggishly as he sought to keep his feet.

"She loped towards me, wolflike, fangs bared, and talons dripping red. I braced myself for the impact, even weaponless as I was..." He paused a moment, seeming almost confused before nodding. "My axe was in the tree, remember?"

The question was rhetorical, Shan d'all knew that, he doubted sometimes whether his master even knew he was there. But the warrior nodded all the same.

"I was prepared to embrace her, you see, I had opened my arms wide to welcome her into Nurgle's fold. Like this."

The Lord of Plagues spread his arms wide, as one would greet an old friend. Before stumbling and falling to his rear with a mighty thud. The bloated warrior chuckled as he crawled to a mighty tree and propped himself against it.

"So there I was, my comrades dying all around, ripped apart by the last great assault the treekin could muster. Drycha bounding towards me, and nary a weapon to be found."

Ser Baldaflax fished something wet and rancid from his pouch and bit into it with a sickening squelch. Grey rivulets of the mystery substance dribbled slowly down his triple chin as he continued.

"But I was without fear, I knew the grandfather had a plan for me yet."

He frowned then. Shan d'all knew where they were in the story, he could feel Ser Baldaflax's heart fall. Such was the champion's sudden and violent decline in mood that the great oak he had propped himself against began to wither before Shan d'all's very eyes, and the rot crows that had nested in its bell strewn boughs dropped suddenly to the earth. Their carcasses half decayed before touching the soggy mire.

"Would that Khorne had had a plan for dear Ranakar." a single tear fell from Ser Baldaflax's rheumy eye and glistened on his pox marked cheek. Shan d'all remembered Ranakar. An ally of convince at first, Ser Baldaflax had grown fond of the Khornate champion. The two had warred at one another's side throughout the campaign for Ayamasa. Several times Shan d'all had heard his master call Ranakar brother. They had made a pact in the name of Archaon, each to aide the other until the crusade had ended. Shan d'all had been there, in the ghyr-peach garden when they had made the oath. Ranakar, Baldaflax, and the other one, the one whose name Shan d'all was forbidden to speak.

"Ranakar the Wrath-Bringer, blood worshiping warrior king that he was, he charged into the Hamadrithal mere seconds before she could get to me. His axe made kindling of her leg, it did! He was a brave one. That was ole Ranakar for you. Brave."

Ser Baldaflax looked down at the muck he sat in and sighed. He was silent then, for a long while. Shan d'all began to wonder if perhaps the drink had gotten to his lord and if he then dreamt of jousts and maidens. Shan d'all hoped he did, he hoped his master dreamed of glory and the love of their god and not the hate-filled visage of the everqueen's executioner that hunted Shan d'all through every nightmare.

Shan d'all removed his cloak and took a step forward to place it on his master when Ser Baldaflax looked up again.

"She ripped him in twain, she did. With barely an effort, like a nurgling ripping the wings from a butterfly. Tore him asunder and tossed his remains to the earth. I felt hate then. For the first time, I think, since the grandfather graced me with his blessings I felt true unabashed hatred."

He took another great bite of whatever revolting substance he held and continued, wet globs of the stuff flying from his lips as he spoke.

"I charged the beast, I don't know why, but I did."

Shan d'all remembered. He had heard the shout of anguish Ser Baldaflax let out at the death of his sworn brother. He had seen the rage swell in his master, and he had watched as the lord of plagues charged Drycha unarmed.

"I was who the beast had come for, after all, it was me she was after."

Shan d'all was unsure of that, Drycha seemed to have no particular prey in mind. Perhaps the tree-beast had simply torn through the battlefield indiscriminately, watering the ground with the red viscera her rage left in its wake. Perhaps it had all been happenstance.

"It had been my fault that noble Ranakar had perished so... worthlessly."

Shan d'all knew better than to speak his thoughts on the matter. He had learned the hard way. The painfully hard way.

"So I charged her, I slammed into her with all that I had. She grabbed me then, sought to slay me in the same brutal manner she had slain my skull hunting companion, but nay! It was not to be."

As Ser Baldaflax's attention turned from the death of his late friend and back to the glory he had won the freshly dessicated oak he had leaned against returned to a new twisted life. Strange bulbous growths emerged from the rotten bark, fleshy and wet. Cracks sighed open in the branches and dripped a luminescent green pus.

"I ripped a talon from her claw and trust it into her chest! Oh how she screamed then! Her sorrow was invigorating, I tell you, truly! The next thing I knew I awoke to a mild discomfort, one of my men was prodding me with a trident to see if I would wake before committing my body to the garden."

Shan d'all remembered the fear he felt when he saw his lord's body lying broken and prone in the undergrowth where Dycha had thrown him. Surely Grandfather Nurgle would never allow the champion that had helped corrupt so great a prize as the Teselli Alari to die... but then again, the whims of the gods are fickle at best.

"Soon enough the Leechlord, bless his name, had me right as acid rain. I still owe him one, that jovial ole fellow, I do. But not as much," Ser Baldaflax lurched to his feet suddenly and rummaged again in his pouch "As I owe you, my brother," the rotbringer said as he pulled out a head, preserved in the amber of an ancient treelord. He gazed down at it a bit before returning it carefully to his pouch and yawning loudly.

"Never did get my axe back... Though I did get this..." Ser Baldaflax reached up and ever so gently touched a trinket that hung from his neck. A mark of Lord Sarn's Favor. For a moment it seemed as though the great Nurglite was lost in thought. "Well, enough of that. Off to bed."

Ser Baldaflax half stumbled half shuffled his way towards his ogor-hide tent humming a tune that Ranakar's men had taught him once upon a time.

Seven paces back, Shan d'all followed, eyes scanning the woods, hands clenching the shaft of his axe. Ever watchful, ever fearful of Drycha's wrathful return.