

Forward

Series: Original (inspired by *Dungeons & Dragons*)

Words: 697

Prompt: “*The plains stirred, the wind bending the blades of grass to its interminable will. Spires of grass stretched skyward, as if dreaming to pierce the void above. The man steeled himself as his thoughts wandered to what must be done.*”

His fingers tighten into fists as the memories crash against the carefully erected walls in the recesses of his mind. The world spins around him, blades of grass fly into the skies, the ground trembles at his feet, the water’s edge ripples, and the trees call out to him, begging him to resist the temptation to give in to suffering.

He loosens his grip ever so slightly, and a burnt leaf floats from his palm to the ground, shaking and swaying along to the rhythm of the earth. The elf’s violet eyes pierce the night sky, wordlessly begging for a taste of vengeance. The air around him tightens, and he can feel his blood race through his veins as he commands the wisps of grass to halt. They fall to the ground, following the lone leaf. Tree stumps scatter the area, but there is nothing more than these remnants of what once were majestic green giants. The flowing water is dull and grey, and no fish dare swim near this godforsaken land. There's barely signs of life left, as any evidence of houses, residents, animals, or crops were burned, leaving piles of rubble and ashes.

He grinds his teeth together and furrows his eyebrows as he examines what remains of his once peaceful village. This isn't the way they were supposed to die. They were supposed to die of their own accord, to become one with nature on their *own* terms.

A voice speaks to him again, in a lost language only a few remember, and he shakes his head, unable to adhere to its commands.

They were taken from him.

A family he worked so hard to love and raise to be one with nature, just as he grew up; a village to protect and mentor into fine scholars and protectors of the earth; *her*, Aryn, the only woman he ever had eyes for — gone, like the leaves of an old withering tree.

He *needs* this. It is his fault they died. *His* hands are stained with their blood. He doesn't know who took away their precious lives. He doesn't know who burned down the sacred grounds of his village. He doesn't know who he’s going to *destroy*, but someone would pay. He'd use his enhanced senses to track these killers to the very last ends of this universe, and he'd face the consequences head-on when it was all said and done.

This would go against every last major teaching in his Druidic training, but he believes, at least for now, that the restlessness of his loved ones' souls is more important than nature's calling. His fingers itch to choke *murderers* out with vines, and his wolf's spirit howls for blood. Oh, they would face no mercy. He'd seen the bodies of his loved ones; without his heightened smell, he wouldn't have recognized them. They were cut into pieces and burned to an unrecognizable crisp, and no one would ever know that his village existed.

He presses his hand against his chest, running calloused fingers over a small totem hanging around his neck, and he could feel his heart thump. His breathing quickens, and the fire inside him sparks, causing him to let out a deep, throaty roar. Hunching over, the elf presses his hands — slowly morphing into clawed paws — against the ground and growls, his mind growing hazy as his rage flares. He'll find them, no problem. Sniff them out and tear them apart. Slowly, though.

Give them slow, excruciating deaths.

Limb from limb.

Burn them.

No rest for the wicked. No respite for the dead.

Kill. Them. *All*.

But he knows that in the process, he will lose the last connection to his desire to live — his tie to the voices of nature will be severed, perhaps to an unrecoverable state.

Validias Greymere knows this, yet he, now more beast than elf, still moves forward, never turning back.

Words echo in his mind as he disappears into a towering, seemingly endless forest:

“Find peace in the life that was spared. There is nothing to be claimed but anguish if you choose the path of revenge.”

His refusal is simple:

“This is all I have left.”