

# WHITE WINTER

Sitting here, alone in the dark, I cannot help but think these disturbing thoughts. I apologize in advance for this. I would never dream of forcing my sorrow unto another's spirit, so I will warn you now, burn these pages. I only write these words in the futile hope that these thoughts racing through my head can be lessened, if only in the slightest.

I fancy myself a forward thinking member of my race. I have a great deal of respect for all beings, sentient or otherwise. Many a year have I spent with the various tribes of the Barbarians, learning their ways, their stories. Some of these I have recorded so that any who would read them might know the same pleasure as I have known over these long years.

Even after all this time, a feeling creeps up my back that I have not felt since those days, long ago, when I was a headstrong young Elf looking to right all of the wrongs in this world. *We are their betters.*

Though I am loath to admit, I still cannot shake the feeling that my kind is better than the less trusted beings that inhabit these lands. It's that feeling that will not allow me to fully trust any outside my own race. I try to tell myself that it is only foolish Elvin pride that is causing this, and that all beings deserve my equal respect and trust, and then the echoes of the past enter my head. The loudest echo of all is that of the story I am about to pass on to you, the story of Ger'lianestra.....

It was as long ago as any written story in our library. We elves had just been born from the mist, and strange creatures fought them for power and territory at every turn. The Undying War with the fey had just begun, and all elf kind banded together to fight the powerful fey. The lands were torn by war, and the forest home of the elves, with a name forgotten by even our eldest scholars, was being threatened with discovery, and subsequent destruction.

Ger'lianestra was beautiful, even by our elven standards. Her hair was as bright as the sun, and her eyes as deep and blue as the most pure watered lake. She was born to a general, and his wife, a powerful healer, one of few blessings a family could hope for in those times. As she began to grow older, all who saw her were amazed by her abilities,

as well as her astonishing appearance. She learned the ways of battle faster than most children twice her age. Even with all of her gifts, however, she was still alone, and began to grow depressed.

Most children her age where in safer towns, far from the battle lines but Ger'lianestra's mother and father were both required by the elven armies and so she grew more and more lonely, until one day a new child, only a few years younger was brought to the town. She was an inquisitive young girl with dark hair and eyes who cried quite a bit, especially in those early days. She was introduced to Ger'lianestra as Shae'inla by her parents, who had begun to notice how lonely their daughter had become. Shae'inla had obviously began taken a liking to Ger'lianestra, but was very shy around her for several weeks. Soon, however, the two grew to be best friends.

Being raised in this time of war meant that all elf children, even the young girls where taught the ways of battle. Ger'lianestra became an accomplished fighter, and a forward scout of some renown. She typically led a small war party which included her best friend Shae'inla. On this particular assignment she was sent out alone, rumors of fey in this forest where believed to be mostly exaggerated, but still the fears needed to be alleviated.

She stalked though the woods, her steps whispering as quietly as the golden autumn leaves falling onto the tall grass. Even with the underbrush, and crackling autumn leaves strewn about the area, she made no noise. Her training served her well this day, because she saw Him before he saw her.

He was obviously fey. His hair and skin where as white as fresh winter snow, and he exuded a strange power beneath his handsome exterior. She saw that his lavish clothes, not fit for the forest, yet still untorn, and unsullied. Only his strange beauty kept Ger'lianestra from loosing the arrow she had notched, and aimed his way. After several long moments the wind shifts, and the fey looks her way. He instantly draws an icy blade, but after laying eyes on Ger'lianestra he too cannot bring himself to attack.

Several minutes pass, and the fey is the first to speak. *I mean you no harm. I have no ties to the fey attacking your people, and only wish to live in peace.* Being an elf, the thought of a peaceful outcome is always a welcome one. The fey has not attacked, and so he may be telling the truth she decides. He sheathes his weapon, and she approaches him slowly. The closer she comes, the more beautiful he looks to her. His hair is short and white, and his skin is smooth like a sculpture. He is built like an elf, just slightly taller, but it's his eyes that draw her in. Blue like she has never seen. Cold chills run up and down her spine as she gazes into them.

She thinks that perhaps it is a fey trick, but she no longer cares, she only wants to hear him speak again. A long moment passes, and he introduces himself. *You can call me White Winter, what is your name?* She stands dumbstruck for another moment before she clears her head and replies *Ger'lianestra* in a soft tone.

*Well that's a strange name, but all of the residents around here seem to have names like that,* he smiles, knowing that fey names most likely seem strange to elves as well. The joke worked, and Ger'lianestra laughs a bit, before asking if White Winter would like to share her lunch with her. He does, and as they eat they talk for hours that felt like minutes to the young elf. She suddenly realizes the hour and heads back, promising to return soon.

Back in the forest encampment of the elves, Ger'lianestra gives a report to her father, the general. *No fey in the forest you say? We figured as much, but you know how the locals can get scared. I apologize for giving you this boring assignment.* His mouth parts in a half smile, and for the first time Ger'lianestra sees the age in her father. Elves as you know, age very slowly, and Ger'lianestra's father would normally look no older than she herself does. In these times of war, however, the stress and lack of sleep shortens the life of even the strongest among us.

Ger'lianestra gives her father a feigned smile before exiting his tent, and heading to her own. Halfway to her tent she is ambushed with a deep hug from her best friend Shae'inla, who goes on about how happy she is that Ger'lianestra is home, safe and sound. Ger'lianestra entertains her with a fake story about an uneventful scouting mission, and that there was nothing to worry about. While she tells it her thoughts slip to a white haired fey she will be seeing again tomorrow.

The next day, as well as everyday for the next few months, transpired in the same way. Ger'lianestra would sneak off to see her love White Winter, in his clearing deep in the forest. The trips were not unnoticed, but her excuses were believable. A walk in the forest, a scouting mission, nothing too hard to believe from a young elf maiden who has never given reason to mistrust her. After the excuse would be given, she would rush through the forest, eager to see her love, yes she realized it now, she was in love and for an elf, love is joy and life.

She meets him with an embrace. *Is my love returned she wonders,* the look in his eyes would say yes. They share a lunch or a dinner, before she returns to the encampment, never noticing the eyes watching her, elven eyes. Tomorrow she will tell him how she feels. They will run away and be together at last. Sleep came with some difficulty to her, but the sun soon rose and she was off.

Ger'lianestra follows the same path as always, humming a song her mother taught her as a child. Today is the day her love promised to run away with her, and nothing her family says will ruin it. She fantasizes about a little cottage somewhere far away, and small children, deep down she hopes they look like White Winter. Her thoughts shift suddenly. A sound in the snow covered brush has her quickly assuming a low battle stance, her sword already drawn.

*It's just me you idiot,* she hears. Ger'lianestra recognizes the voice as her friend Shae'inla, and sheaths her blade. *Maybe if you would have paid attention in stealth lessons you wouldn't have startled me,* Ger'lianestra teases back. Shae'inla narrows her gaze and says in a serious tone, *I know why you're out here Ger'lianestra, You're going to see that fey again aren't you?* Ger'lianestra is shocked for a moment, how could she know? Shae'inla walks closer to her friend and says softly, *please come home with me.*

*No, I will not leave, I love him.* Ger'lianestra says, anger tinting her every word as she backs away. *He is our enemy Ger'lianestra, you know we cannot trust the fey.* Shae'inla argues weakly, as she holds back her tears.

Shae'inla's eyes glaze over for just a moment before the strange blade bursts through her stomach. A look of terror crosses her face, but is quickly replaced by a stern look of resignation. Her legs give out after what seems like an eternity, and she falls to the ground. As her life blood mixes with the fresh powdery snow, she struggles to lift her head. No air is left in her lungs to speak, but the young elf maiden gathers the strength to mouth a final word to her beloved Ger'lianestra..... *run*

She would have done just that if not for the strange icy creatures already surrounding her. Ger'lianestra was no novice in battle, but she knew she would not leave this forest alive without help. She begins to search frantically for White Winter, only he could help her now. She begins to give up hope. These beasts must have killed her love. Anger rises in Ger'lianestra at that thought, and she raises her sword, prepared to take as many of the creatures with her as possible. She hears a voice which halts her before she manages to swing. The creatures take a step back as if in fear, and then retreat. Feelings of great joy and relief overwhelm her as White Winter limps out of the forest, his hair the longest it has been since the winter began. She rushes to him smothering him in a deep hug, her face buried in his long white hair, his body cold to the touch against hers.

She feels strange for a moment, a sharp coldness, with just a tinge of pain in her chest. As White winter pulls his Icy blade from Ger'lianestra and she falls to her knees, he smiles at the look of disbelief on her face. *You didn't really think I could fall for one of your kind did you?* The unchanging look of disbelief is his only answer, only serving to annoy him. *I will tell the rest of your foolish kindred that it was you who betrayed them...my love.* The last word said to Ger'lianestra tinged with sarcasm.

White Winter cleans his blade on Shae'inla's sleeve before calling back the creatures. Great icy wings grow from his back, and he takes flight, laughing mockingly all the while.

The last thought on Ger'lianestra's mind as she lay dying, watching her beautiful White Winter fly toward the forest home of the elves, was of her "love". *Do fey live forever? Will I ever see him again, I wonder?* Her cheeks feel warm with tears for a short moment before the darkness settles in at last.

---And at last you know. This is the very story that has caused my inner turmoil. It is the reason I cannot fully trust these beings. The reason we as a people cannot trust the fey, or any other of the monstrous creatures that would do us harm. I apologize once again for putting this on you, as it was put on me all of those years ago by the actions of a single fey. May you and I both overcome these feelings of mistrust that swell beneath the surface.

Shae'inla Menderhan  
Just a Friend