Wilted Flowers

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Wilted Flowers

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Summary

As far back as anyone can remember, there have been goblins. Goblins are savage killers, monsters of the lowest sort. Though simple and frolicsome, they are cunning. Their muliebrity is equal to their sadism. Goblins live by impulse. They won't stop until they get what they want. Neither will he...

Its the story you know, with one major difference. The goblins are all women!

Chapter 1: Muliebrity

As far back as anyone can remember, there have been goblins.

Warrior had a boisterous spring in his step as he led the march through the woods. He swung his legs high in the air, making each step a merry mockery of a military march. Fighter and Priestess smiled, half in embarrassment, the other half endeared. Wizard just grumbled to herself a scornful curse upon all men. His boyish charm was cute, but these childish antics did little to raise the girls opinion of him. Yet he got them to smile. Mission Accomplished, as far as he was concerned. In Warrior's imagination, they were already his harem, doomed to compete for his affections. In truth, Fighter was the only girl for him.

A little bit of brevity was needed for the chore ahead.

Goblins had been robbing a village by nightfall, but now they were growing bolder. It was a typical story. Sharp tools would go missing, a couple chickens or pig here or there. Stores would be broken into, cakes and other sweets from the bakery would disappear. “Oh the little dears are just trying to feed themselves!” the womenfolk would titter.

Then the villagers would find graffiti on the walls; cave paintings of wolves; tiny, long eared hunters, and cocks. All stamped in signature by little hand or footprints. As goblins grow bolder, they can be seen in the daylight, scurrying about stealing things like a pack of wild Rheas. But people would write it all off as just silly mischief. “Better to let sleeping goblins lie” so the folk saying went.

But then weapons from the town guard would vanish. The last straw would come when several young men and women went missing. This would not be cause for alarm, if it were merely lovers meeting in secret.

The fact they never came back, compelled the village to seek the Guild's aid.

Through the forest the party marched, sliding down an incline to a cave underneath a tree. Its roots curled like fangs at the roof of the entrance. A grisly totem marked the place as the goblin's lair. An animal skull was perched atop a pole. Feathers hung from its horns like war banners. Eager to show off, Warrior kicked the primitive thing down.

“Is that really necessary?” Priestess was a bit unnerved by the sudden outburst.

“It's only goblins,” Warrior sneered. “After we're done I might take it home.”

“Oh please don't!” said Fighter. “That thing gives me the creeps.”

“Then don't look at it!” He grinned ear to ear, but his friend puffed out her cheeks in irritation. Wizard just shook her head. Typical.

“Can we just get on with this?” she demanded. *If only I had found a party of only women...*

The party stared at her, then smiled, smoothing over the outburst with a polite giggle. Fighter put a reassuring hand on her shoulder, to which Wizard smiled shyly. Warrior drew his sword and lit a torch. It was go time.

The air grew cold and stale. The stench of body odor and flowers cloyed their senses. The smell of death lurked just beneath the surface. The darkness was blinding, in spite of the efforts of the torch. Priestess stumbled into Wizard, the rings of her staff rattled as they collided.

“S-sorry!” she said earnestly, which did nothing to soften to scowl of her comrade.

The horror came upon them without warning, jutting up from the darkness like some devil. Standing at a cross path, one of the missing women had been impaled through vagina and out through the neck. Her skin was wounded with hundreds of cuts; tribal runes carved from shoulder to toe (some of which were bitten off). The breasts were cut off entirely, with gobs of gore still oozing. Her fingers were chopped off. A goat's skull sat atop the neck in place of

a head. Bloody runes enchanted it with shamanic death, made all the more mystical by the beaded tassels, and feathers dangling from the horns. It was a ghost of the totem from before.

Goblins are savage killers. Monsters of the lowest sort.

It couldn't be helped. Wizard screamed in shrill terror. All froze at the sight of the thing, shaking with horror, then anger and disgust. The stench of death was as unbearable as the buzzing of the flies. Priestess doubled over and vomited. The impulse to flee gnawed at her heart.

Warrior grit his teeth and clenched his sword tight. His eyes gleamed with blood lust.

“Where are they?” he growled. His eyes shifted from left to right, both corridors looked the same. The choice was made for them with the shrill sound of sobbing. It crept from the left passage, inviting them deeper. The party dashed after the cries of the helpless victim, heedless of the tiny footsteps tip toeing behind them. The tunnel was a tight squeeze. The party bent down to pass through. With a bump and a hiss Warrior rushed down the narrow path while the girls brought up the rear.

The tunnel opened to a jagged chamber. There on the floor was a naked youth, bound by hand and foot. Like Warrior, he was a tender and slender lad. His long black hair was pulled back in a pony tail. His pale skin was filthy with dirt, marred by cuts made by cat like claws and fangs. The sobbing boomed from within the chamber. It had to have been from the lad. Warrior charged ahead to save him.

Though simple and frolicsome, they are cunning.

Fighter thought she saw feathers shifting in ledges above. Arrows tore through the air with sharp hisses, striking the earth around Warrior's feet. One grazed his arm, another tore through his inner thigh. Warrior cried aloud as his leg grew warm and wet, the sting in his arm and leg disoriented him. The sobbing shifted into churlish and squealing laughter. Wizard and Priestess saw figures rushing up the tunnel behind them. A wall of crude stone spears, pitchforks, and guardsman's pikes was coming to stab at them.

The other side of the chamber was nothing but rock, upon which was a cave painting; a long eared skull grinned evilly at the intruders. Up upon the ledges, the little devils had cover behind boulders. From their perch they laid down a suppressing fire of arrows on the party.

The party was trapped. The chamber was a kill zone!

Wizard tried to mumble an incantation, timidly holding up her staff in the direction of the tunnel. Arrows plunged into her back and she gurgled up blood. She fell to the floor twitching. Fighter thrust Priestess to the wall, covering her with her body.

“Stay down!” said she, as another hail of arrows struck into her backside. Sting piled upon sting, but she refused to cry out. As Fighter grit her teeth, Priestess shrank back, hugging her staff for comfort.

In desperate rage, Warrior flung his sword up at the hidden archers. The sword flew over them and clattered uselessly. The shadows cackled with glee.

“Damn it!” Warrior said, stomping his foot into the ground. The lad they came to rescue rose up from the floor without even a whisper. The rope about his wrists and ankles were decorative, and he had a club hidden to his breast. With one swift swing he bashed Warrior in the back of the head. The torch fell from his hand to the floor, casting the chamber in an eerie glow. The lad's eyes were dead, his lips smeared with green sores. Adventurers called it The Goblin's Kiss, a kind of herpes one only acquires from being *assaulted* by goblins.

When Warrior fell, Priestess feared he was dead. She stared at the bizarre naked youth standing numb over him. Was this man in league with the goblins? How? Why?

Fighter coughed up blood, her fingers dug deep into Priestess' robes. She clung to her for support, but her knees gave out, toppling the both of them over. A shrill trilling and whooping boomed through out the chamber and tiny figures clambered down from the ledges, and rushed in from the tunnel. Priestess saw their bare feet standing before her; Green skinned, tiny but pudgy, ending in sharp black claws. This one had an anklet of bead, feather, and bone. Priestess' eyes trailed upwards the goblin's stout curves, squashed in a pygmy body.

Their muliebrity is equal to their sadism.

"*Women!"* Priestess realized in horror. *"They're women!"*

The she-goblins were near naked, shamelessly letting their ample breasts hang bare. Their breechclouts were not for modesty, but to accent the squat parody of their femininity, of which they were proud. They further decorated themselves with fang necklaces, feather tipped headbands, and sharpened barbs through their pug like nostrils. Some wore their luscious black hair long, done up in pony tails or messy buns. Others cut them into short bobs. Their skin was daubed in muddy white war paint. In the flickering dark, they seemed as grinning skeletons. In their pudgy fists they carried weapons of stone and bone, as well as those that had looted from the village. Their eyes were cat's eyes, yellow as mold that glittered with a malicious void.

Though they snickered, their eyes were full of hate. With a hiss and a roar they charged at Priestess' fallen comrades. Before she could move a pudgy foot smashed atop her head, driving her face into the dirt. The goblin grinned, delighting in the power she had over her captive. Priestess looked up with pleading eyes at the long eared savage. The bitch slammed her heel into Priestess' face, as her comrades joined in to stomp and kick the would be adventurer. Some used their butts of their spears, or ball-headed root clubs to beat Priestess, undeterred by her yelps of pain. If anything it spurred them to hit her again, and again.

As Priestess curled herself into a ball, she witnessed the horrible fate of her fellows. For the women, the goblins hacked apart with hatchets, screeching in furious rage. They squat over Wizard and Fighter, pummeling them, ripping them, tearing out the guts and gulping them down raw. Their round cheeks were soon smeared with blood. It had been some time since they had eaten, as they had devoured the stores they had stolen from the village. Blood pooled from the bodies, which some of the goblins lapped up like dogs. Once pieces of armor

and bits of jewelry were ripped off, the goblins turned on one another fighting over who got to keep the spoils. They were no less brutal to each other, pummeling one another with their fists, scratching out eyes with their claws, or just straight up stabbing their rivals. But the goblins just sneered at their fallen. The skinny ones at the outer edge of the ring, who missed their opportunity to eat of the women, licked their lips at the prospect of their former sisters' meat.

The victor claimed her goods with a wolfish snarl, as the others hunched over and backed away. Crocodile tears flowed down their cheeks, as they grit their fangs in frustration.

Priestess wailed in mourning, when a goblin grabbed her by the hair, forcing her to look up. This savage had a regal countenance to her with her knitted white shawl hanging off her shoulders. Her round face was painted as a skull. Her frizzy hair flowed long and wild, crowned with a headdress of feathers and bones. Many golden rings decorated her elongated ears. She held aloft a primitive staff as if it contained some dark power. She grinned as she pulled back her shawl. Two shrunken heads hung from her thigh by their hair. Priestess gagged, they were the heads of the women who had gone missing!

A horrible crack sounded as a goblin axe came down on Wizard's neck. Moments later her head was lifted up for all to see. Her face was frozen in state of disheveled exhaustion. The goblins trilled and whooped in savage triumph, hopping about as they pounded their fingers against their lips. Priestess shuttered. Was this too to be her fate? Why hadn't they killed her yet? She froze in her thoughts recalling the evil totem.

"*No...It can't be...*" Priestess eyes went wide as she wet herself. The Witch sniffed the air and cackled with infernal glee. A small fight broke out over Wizard's glasses. It amused them that they could not see clearly through them. But when one tried to bite the glass, it shattered, slashing her tongue. The offending thing was hurled against the wall. As the goblin spat up the shards, her comrades laughed at her.

The traitorous man knelt before the Goblin Witch, holding up Wizard's staff as if it were sacrosanct. The Witch squealed as she greedily grabbed it, *then licked it over*. She gnawed at the red gem embedded in the end of the staff, as if to test its strength. Satisfied, she pitched her old staff, intending to leave it to rot.

Warrior's girlish scream drew both Priestess and the Witch's attention (her apparent slave kept his head bowed). While he was knocked out the goblins pulled off his boots, his armor, and

his *pants*. With devious smiles they licked their lips, as they pulled aside their loincloths and dog piled him.

His squeals of desperation were drowned out by the lewd cries of the goblins.

Goblins live by impulse. They won't stop until they get what they want.

As the torch burned out, Priestess felt herself violently pulled to her feet and dragged out of the chamber. The Witch sauntered past, intent on joining in the ravishing. The male slave and a cohort of goblins forced Priestess back down the tunnel. They were soon at the cross path again, the pitch black masked the evil totem, not that it was a comfort to Priestess. She could smell the stink of its horror, of her destiny. This was how she was going to die. Impaled alive by spiteful she-goblins until she breathed her last. Then she would be beheaded, her head shrunken and added to the Witch's collection. Then they would put up her corpse as a cruel mockery of the Earth Mother. Somewhere deeper down in the right path, turgid drums were beating. Or was it her own heart beat?

"*If it's at all possible...*" she prayed. "*Somebody, anybody...Please save me!*"

But nobody was coming to save her.

Neither will I.

A hellish flame drove the dark back, drawing the vexed glare of the goblins. Could they have missed one? A crude warrior of some kind carried the flame. A short sword was in his hand ready for the kill. A small buckler guarded the wrist that held the torch. The goblins shrieked with hate at the cursed light. The five swarmed into position around him, as the man-slave

grabbed Priestess from behind, holding her at the neck in a choke hold. A goblin shrieked as she leaped into the air, stabbing the newcomer with a dagger.

Run away, Priestess wanted to scream. *There's too many…*

The newcomer's blade swept the air with the speed of a cobra, slicing the goblin down in mid air. She cried out in pain as she fell to the earth dying. The dirty warrior bashed her head with his boot, kicking her back down the path.

"One," he said monotone. No banter. No glee. Nothing. He was faceless behind his helmet's grill. What were decorative horns were broken off on the helm's sides. The goblins eyes went wide with horrid realization. This was the one the other tribes spoke of in hushed tones around campfires. The iron devil that hated their kind like goblins hate Humans. Heedless of the terror that quaked her palms, the second goblin charged with her spear, intent on skewering the invader.

The spear scraped uselessly against his chest plate, as the warrior drew back his sword arm like a piston. The short sword penetrated through the goblin's mouth and back out from the neck.

"Two."

The remaining goblins shook with fear as they back peddled. The iron man's stride was mechanical, and unrelenting. Seeing they had lost the advantage they turned to run, mewling as children as they went. That spurred his anger as he rushed forward, slashing his sword into the back of one of the goblins. His charge continued, as he hurled the sword like a spear, impaling the back of the coward.

"Four."

Priestess felt her captor shiver. The slave's bloodshot eyes ran wet with tears. In fury he thrust her aside then charged the slayer with his club, wailing as his war cry. But the warrior thrust at him with the burning torch. Dim, primitive instinct caused the slave to be driven back as his foe pressed the attack. He slammed his fist into the lad's gut. When he doubled

over he smashed his knee into his groin. He brought up his shield into a backhand, knocking the slave to the floor. The warrior wasn't finished. He mounted his victim, and rained down blow after blow after blow. His mailed fist became a hammer, smashing the face of the once baby faced youth. The last thing the lad saw was the red hateful glare, that shined in the warrior's eye.

Once he was sure the slave was dead, he jammed the torch into his face for good measure before rising.

He did not add him to his bloody tally.

Priestess sat and stared up at him, trying to process all that she had seen.

"Who...who are you?" When his head turned at her she flinched. She drew back, fearful that she was going to be his next victim.

"Goblin Slayer," he said. He glared at her, analyzing her garb and staff. Her purpose here was instantly made obvious. "Your party is dead."

Priestess wanted to cry. She nodded instead in confirmation. She watched as the Slayer took a moment to check his surroundings and gather weapons from his fallen foes. "You...you killed that man!" The brutality of it shook her to the core.

"He was a Thrall. One who serves the goblins." He fetched his sword and examined it. It was too slick with blood and fat to be of further use, so he jut it into the dirt for now. The Thrall's club was little more that a thick tree branch, repurposed for violence. He swung it a few times for good measure. It was sturdy enough to keep.

Priestess shook her head, confused at how the man could be so dismissive. "He was human! One of the villagers!"

“Some say it's a disease goblins carry, that warps the mind,” He picked up a guardsman’s pike, and examined its steel tip. The spear was in excellent condition, so he kept it. The other goblin had a farmer’s machete. It was sturdy enough, so he stuck it in his belt. “It makes sense given the ruder diseases they transmit. Some say the Thralls are put under a spell, goblins do have Witches. Others are just depraved. All were held captive by the goblins, and used as breeding stock. They've had the humanity sucked out of them.” He slammed his boot down upon the head of the dead Thrall, his eye blazing with relentless hatred. “They're *less* than insects.” The head made a splintering crack as a tide of blood oozed out.

Priestess flinched and looked away as the Slayer punished the corpse again. He drew a knife and surveyed his apparent kills. Not content with having pulverized them, he ritualistically slit each of their throats to be sure the kill was complete. The goblin with the dagger lay dead as the Slayer bent down to finish it off. Its little fingers suddenly clenched the knife as it snapped its jaws at his face with a snarl. Though bleeding out, she had just enough strength to try one last stab. His hand shot out to pin her down. She squealed as his other hand slowly cut across her throat. Her legs thrashed wildly, as she gasped and gurgled, pleading for mercy in her primitive tongue. The machine like Slayer held her there until the last of her life blood had oozed out. He then took her dagger, adding it to his growing arsenal.

“Four,” he said again. He wiped the blade off his knife and returned it to his holster. He missed his step, feeling a sudden rush of haziness upon him. He grabbed his bag with a trembling hand, and produced a vial of potion. He slid the grate of his helmet up, and sucked the potion down in a few gulps. With a shuddering breath he stood straight again, and no longer wobbled.

“How many did you see?” he demanded. Priestess bit her lip, unnerved by every thing this man was. Was he even human?

“Down there,” she pointed at the left tunnel. “A dead end. They shot at us with arrows, and blocked us in. They…” She couldn’t finish. There was no need to. It was an ambush. Goblins were no geniuses, but seeing as they were led by a Witch, they had managed this much of a trap. He nudged his head in the direction of the totem.

“A Witch leads this band,” said the Slayer. “Some say they worship the Earth Mother, same as Humans and Elves. But their view of her is more warped, twisted.” The evil totem spoke for itself. “Are you injured?” It was said less out of concern and more out of clinical demand. Priestess groaned. Her whole body ached from the beating she endured. She had thankfully managed to cover her head, lest they had knocked her out unconscious. She shook her head.

“I see,” was all he said. Anger ignited in Priestess’ belly. “You should leave.” The order was like a slap in the face. She sat stunned as he turned to leave her.

“No…” she said. Slayer halted and turned.

“No?” His tone was almost smug, the first bit of emotion he’d shown at all besides hate.

“No!” Priestess used her staff like a walking stick to stand, fighting through the pain. “I can’t just leave it be.”

“I don’t babysit weaklings,” his words echoed a voice from long ago. He hated hearing them come out of his mouth, but they had to be said.

“They took one of us alive!” Priestess insisted. The thought of Warrior ending up like the Thrall was too horrible to contemplate. “I won’t leave him.”

“He… is a lover?”

Priestess drew back, then shook her head. “I would be spitting in the face of my Goddess if I ran away now. I won’t let *them* just have their way with him.” She stood a little straighter. “Take me with you!”

He paused to consider. “Did you see any big ones?” Big ones. There was a terrifying thought. She shook her head with a grunt. “How many spells do you have?”

“All three. Holy Light, and Minor Heal.”

“I see,” He turned with a shrug of his shoulder, indicating for her to follow. “You will follow my orders to the letter. If you slip up, you’re on your own. Got it?” She nodded again with a

grunt. He bent down to grab a goblin corpse. The slender thing had the twisted likeness of a little girl. That he so easily lifted it by the ankle made her skin crawl. “Cover yourself in its blood. It will hide your piss stink.” He threw the thing at her feet. Her cheeks went red. Though she hesitated, it was too late to back out now. Warrior’s screams echoed in her mind. “They have a keen sense of smell. As an adventurer you should get used to the stench of gore and viscera. Ours is a life of violence.”

Priestess retched, trying her best to swallow the impending throw up, as she smeared the gore upon her clothes.

“You should use one of your Heals on yourself. You can’t afford to be slow.” He could see from her wincing that she had been beaten half to death. She hissed. His words made sense, but did he have to be so cruel about it?

Priestess said her prayers and her body glowed with golden light. She felt her wounds wash away from her body. With that he ventured down the right path. Priestess reached out to grab his arm.

“W-wait they’re down…” The words caught in her throat as his shivering fist stopped short of striking her cheek. With a flick of his shoulder, he threw off her grip. She shrank back. What could she have done wrong?

“Don’t touch me!” He growled. “Never. *Ever*. Touch me.” He held her gaze for a time to engrave the command into her. Then he resumed his machine like pace back into the dark.

Her instincts told her to run away. This man was more than dangerous. He was a vicious monster in his own right.

She followed all the same.

“The totem was part of the trap,” he explained. “They hate women of the other races. They know seeing one in such a state will get anyone’s attention. Did you scream?”

“I…wanted to. Wizard did though.”

“That sounded the alarm. They moved into position. You heard crying?”

“Y-yes! We thought it was a prisoner.”

“Goblins can cry on command. It’s more deadly than their claws, at least for newbies. They know most will hesitate if they cry. Then they stab you.” Priestess swallowed. How horrid these little creatures were, and they were supposed to be the weakest of all monsters?

“How can they be so dangerous?”

“Even a cornered rabbit has teeth.” Again he was echoing the spiteful lectures of his past. He learned them well, he’d be dead by now if he hadn’t. Or worse…

The way was silent. He thought he had heard drums, but they apparently ceased. The enemy knew they were coming. Goblins loved digging as much as they did dancing, drinking, stealing and murdering. It was likely they had a network of tunnels all through out this cave. All those paths would lead to their main nest. A pity for them he had the tools to take advantage of that.

He tossed his torch down the way and lit a second one. “They can see in the dark. Light too, but it bothers them at first. Pay attention to any sounds.” He checked every corner of the tunnel for any hidden tunnels; perches from which they could shoot arrows, throw javelins or…

He raised his shield as a dart reflected off it. A skinny little goblin scout lay on her belly, using the vantage of an overhanging tunnel to shoot blow darts at them. Her eyes went wide as she realized she’d been spotted. She fumbled with the long wooden tube, trying to get another dart in. The Slayer stuck his spear through her chest, ending her with gasp.

“Five,” The bloody tally continued. The next wave came from further up the way, drawn by the lights. Three goblins carried stolen shields, and farm tools as weapons. Priestess hid behind Slayer as he flung the looted dagger at one of them. He threw it low with practiced ease, and it collided through the throat of a goblin, who gagged with unexpected pain as it fell backwards. “Six.”

He darted to his left, exposing the Goblins un-shielded sides. He jabbed the first one in the gut, who fell over crying. The other raised her shield smartly. Slayer’s arm pistoned back, then stabbed her in the leg. She had barely hit the dirt, when his boot came down and smashed her neck. The first tried to scuttle away on her butt, holding her blood in with her hand. The Slayer struck again, skewering her head.

“Eight.”

The third goblin’s jaw dropped as she hurled down her weapons, turned and ran. The Slayer lumbered after her with the ferocity of a werewolf closing in on its prey. With his long legs, the little bitch didn’t get far. His spear plummeted through her back and stopped at the floor. The goblin froze with wide eyes. She was barely aware that she’d been skewered, then died.

The way sloped downward. The stench of their cloying body odor was getting stronger. Goblins rarely bathed, so they rubbed their bodies with flowers and other herbs to make themselves “smell pretty”. This was it. Slayer got out a coil of rope and stakes, and lined them up at his feet.

“Remember where this is, or you’ll die.”

“Yessir!” This Goblin Slayer was an utter madman, but an expert at his craft. She could see the way they shook with fear at the sight of him. Was he known to them? She felt as if any moment he could turn his blade on her. That the blood of the goblins would not be enough to satisfy his lust. But he was only weapon she had, if she wanted to avenge her comrades.

If she wanted to make it out of here alive.

At the edge of a downward slope, he stopped suddenly, and she nearly bumped into him. She thanked the Goddess she didn’t.

“When I give the word, use your Holy Light.”

She pondered his intent, then understood his strategy. “Understood!” she whispered.

“Now hold your breath.” He reached for a grenade in his bag. “Remember how I said they have a keen sense of smell?” Before Priestess could react he hurled the thing down into the chamber below. An ear shattering pop went off, followed by the stinging smell of chili powder. Girlish screams and coughing erupted from the chamber as the goblins stamped up the path. Slayer drew back and Priestess followed his lead. She started to pray in preparation.

“Now!”

“Holy Light!” Just as the goblins cleared the tunnel, their beastly eyes were assaulted by a blinding light. They crashed into walls, and each other. Some tumbled back down the slope shrieking. Some charged a head, their weapons swinging, only to get their ankles caught in the rope and go tumbling over onto the floor. The Slayer stood over them waiting.

“Welcome to hell,” said he. He swung the club down, splattering a goblin's head like a melon. With mechanical precision, he hammered again and again, bathing the floor and walls with gore. The stench of fresh blood assaulted Priestess' nostrils, so she covered her mouth with her sleeve.

“Nine, ten, eleven, twelve.” The death toll rose, but his fury did not abate. He never seemed to tire. “Thirteen, fourteen, fifteen...” The smallest were crushed in a single blow. The full grown warriors, resplendent in their many feathered headbands, these took two to three blows. Their crude, sniveling cries were anything but child like. More like the squealing of pigs to the slaughter. He didn't care, mercy was a word he learned to forget.

The Witch crashed into one of her blind fellows, and tumbled back down the slope, landing harsh on her rump. Her headdress fell off, her long scraggly hair fell across her face and shoulders. She was left sitting there with her legs splayed open, in the midst of the horrid but

dying pepper stench. As sight returned to her burning wet eyes, she growled in petulance. Clutching her staff she grunted a churlish chant, invoking the chaos that was the Dark Mother of Goblins. The ruby tip radiated with a foul fuchsia light, causing dormant saplings in the earth to ignite in its flame. Like worms, fresh vines burst forth, pulsing through the dirt, growing thick as they engorged on dark magic. The burst out under the adventurers feet, poised to crush them in their steely grip.

Priestess screamed as they slithered up her legs, shot out from the ground and bound her wrists, pulling her arms out. The vines wrapped up her belly, then her chest. They were closing in on her neck. Soon she would be mummified and strangled to death! The Witch grunted a mad, panting laugh, as Slayer's legs were also ensnared. Was he doomed to join her harem of the damned?

Slayer had counted on the dark glow, that he might easily pin point where the Witch was. The moment her staff blazed, he cast the club aside and snatched up his spear. With olympian might he hurled it into the dark. Flying like a missile, it penetrated her chest. She was still giggling as she was thrown backwards. For a moment she blacked out, losing her sense of time. She was befuddled when she found herself lying on her back, soaking in her own blood. Her staff had flown from her hand, causing the conjured vines to lose their muscle. Slayer marched forward, shredding through the vines that held him as if they were nothing. The Witch looked up at her executioner, mewling like a baby monkey.

First he crushed her stomach under his boot to pin her. He retrieved his spear to stab her again in the chest. Then the *neck*. Up and down. Over and over he smote her without so much as a roar. His final strike pierced her forehead. Not even a necromancer would have been able to resurrect her mangled corpse.

“Sixteen,” said he.

The vines withered and died swiftly. Priestess was able to get slack on her arms, and chew through the bindings. She ripped at them with bestial frenzy. She would not be left behind. She would not fail her comrade, nor The Slayer...

He did not look back. He drew his club and surveyed the nest by the light of his torch. It was a typical base for Tribals. Pictographs smeared the cave walls with fierce little figures. Crude goblins thrust spears in triumph and hunted deer, rabbits, humans, and squirrels with bows. The figures pranced around fire and skulls under the light of the horned moon. The most

terrible image depicted a massive black goblin woman sitting in lotus pose. The tiny figures swarmed at her lap, her head was that of a ram's skull. This savage goddess had her curvaceous body painted in red runes. A stone table was set before the depiction, upon which smote candles sat atop blood stains. A gnarly dagger of bone waited there, yearning for the next sacrifice. Its blade shimmered fuchsia in the dim light.

Half eaten bones, feathers and other refuse littered the floor. Chicken feet hung from the ceiling on strings along side gourds. He spotted a corner where flint knapping took place; Half formed stone knives, ax heads, grinders, and arrow heads littered the floor. Not too alarming in of themselves. But when he spotted a pile of shoes he hissed. Not far from that was a collection of metal helmets and bracers. Near them was a jerkin of boiled leather with a thick shoulder pad. Next to that was the beginnings of a smaller, cruder imitation, half stitched together.

Priestess came bumbling up behind him. She tried her best to tip toe around the sea of bones, as if merely touching them would be infectious.

“You see these?” He pointed with the club at the shoes. All of them were worn and tiny, either for women or for children. She nodded, it was queer sight. “When Tribals start to horde shoes, they're about to evolve. They get smart enough to smelt iron, and cobble leather. In another month their numbers would have tripled, and they'd have burned that village to the ground.” His head whipped around at the sound of a pale moan. Priestess ducked behind Slayer as he pursued the groans.

Lying on the floor were three young men. All were naked, but only two of them were painted as savages. These Thralls lays as though dead. Indeed their eyes were glossed over. Their inert breathing was the only indication of life. Their hair was wild, done up with tiny pig tails sprouting across their heads. Their limbs were decorated with tribal jewelry of hemp, bead, and bone. Signs of favor? Or perhaps another means to emasculate the captives. Their nails were painted a variety of colors. They each carried bruises across their sprawled bodies. The third, bore no jewelry, and no paint. He was not as filthy, but just as mazed as the other two. For he was the latest entry into the harem.

Warrior lay trembling, his eyes wide with terror. Drool oozed from his lips like a wound. Priestess bolted forward to aid him, but Slayer's arm shot out to block her.

“Let go! Let go! He needs hel...” The first Thrall's eye twisted in their direction. He crawled with diabolic frenzy to attack Slayer's legs. His comrade tucked back into a roll, squatting like a caveman. Both men screamed like maniacs, drowning out Priestess' own. Slayer didn't wait. The moment the first came into range, he swung his boot like a sledgehammer, cracking the savage's painted face, and setting free another tooth. With the Thrall dazed, Slayer followed up with a crushing blow from the club.

“Light!” he ordered. The Thrall at his feet was still moving. Though often malnourished, Thralls had the ferocity of *bears*. They were typically tougher than their goblin mistresses. The other Thrall was on his feet, knife in hand, and sprinting to flank the pair. She only had seconds to spare. The first savage redoubled his efforts, clambering up Slayer's chest to grapple for control of the club. She mumbled her prayers as fast as she could, stumbling and restarting the words. She could hear the beast's desperate, wet pants in her ear. His fingertips were grazing her hair, intent on closing in a fist and yanking her head back. The idiot grinned, showing off his missing teeth, as he lifted his knife to stab.

“Holy Light!” the spell seared the chamber, and the bloodshot eyes of the savages. They were driven back to their knees, but Slayer had kept his shut. He tossed the club aside and drew the machete. He whipped and slashed the Thrall before him. Blind and bleeding the savage jerked and howled until he died. Slayer then turned on his heel and shoved Priestess out of the way. The second Thrall he stabbed in the gut, turning it to shred his insides. He noted the Thrall's lips were painted red. How appropriate, Slayer thought.

With the Thralls dead, Slayer resumed his search for anything he might have missed. Without a moment's hesitation Priestess rushed to Warrior's side, and tried to help him sit up.

The moment she touched him he went berserk, flailing about as he tried to crawl away.

“NO! No more! Please!” he cried. It was as though he was still being ravished. Priestess tried to mumble assurances, and was kicked in the chest for her trouble. She coughed and sat back up, and watched him scamper off to a corner. There he curled up and wept into his knees.

“Leave him be,” said Slayer. “He's still in shock.”

“But...” Priestess started to argue, then fell silent. She hated this helpless feeling. They won didn't they?

Slayer smashed apart a throne of sticks and bones. His final target eluded him, behind the throne there was only a wall. A goblin skull was painted there, sticking it tongue out. He scoured the nest until he came upon barrels of looted beer. His keen ear heard shuffling behind them. With furious strength he tore and rolled them away. Hidden behind was a small cave. Priestess' blood froze at the sound of a wailing baby. Maybe it was another captive, she tried to rationalize.

Huddled together were the goblin *children*.

They had the slender doughiness of toddlers. Their bare skin was painted like the rest of their tribe. Simple breechclouts protected their scant modesty. Their hair was cut into bobs, and they wore no feathered headbands, as their clan's warriors did. All were sobbing, trembling with fear. It broke Priestess' heart to look upon them, for she realized what must follow. The tallest of them stood in front of the others. She wore a hemp anklet, painted in red and yellow tribal chevrons. She stood straight with her feet together, toes pointed inward ever so slightly. She tried her best to look up in awe at the Slayer, hands held shyly behind her back. She fluttered her long eyelashes with her big, pouting eyes.

“Big brother?” she squeaked with unrefined cuteness. Anyone else's heart would have melted.

Not his.

He'd seen it all before. Goblins taught their daughters to weaponize their girlishness, to beg for mercy. Novices would take pity and let the little heathens go. The survivor would learn from the encounter, and go on to spawn tribes more cunning and ruthless than the one that birthed them. The cancer had to be cut off before it could grow.

He clenched the machete in his fist and stepped forward. The child flinched.

“Big brother?” More insistent this time, but still sweet. Another step and she stepped back trembling. “Big brother?”

Another step. Her little heart was about to burst. Her tears meant nothing. Over and over she mumbled the words like a chant of protection, big brother, big brother. Her shrill voice broke into a sob.

Another step. He was a giant towering over them. Blood dripping from his sword as he raised his blade to strike.

“Oh gods...” Priestess covered her mouth. “He's going to...” Her feelings clashed in her heart with the violence of opposing armies. It was madness she couldn't reconcile. They were only little girls! Goblin girls who would grow up to commit atrocities if left unchecked. The vile totem haunted her, she could almost hear the screams of the its victim. The woman they tortured until she could suffer no more, then beheaded with an axe of rock. They were going to do the same to *her*. The goblins murdered her comrades, and made Warrior their plaything. The battle surged and one side prevailed. Her words were decided.

“Y-you can't!”

“Do not think of them as girls,” he warned. “Open your eyes and see the creatures for what they are. A squirming mass of hatred and envy.” With a quick slash he ended the first. Her tiny body toppled over with a gurgling whine. The others froze in horror, too frightened to so much as sniffle. One of them hugged a babe close to her cheek to try and shush it. He raised his killing hand again, eager to complete this monstrous chore.

A sudden weight fell upon his shoulders and back, falling from a nook in the ceiling with a vicious snarl. A tiny fist hammered at his helmet. Tiny claws and fangs nipped at his neck, desperate to do any damage. Slayer hissed as the goblin runt rampaged on his back, biting and kicking. In spite of its nuisance, he plowed ahead hacking the remaining goblins apart. Though they tried to run, their juvenile limbs made them clumsy, made worse by their panic. When they tripped on their own pudgy feet, Slayer stabbed them in the back. In one swift motion he pistoned his sword, and slit the throats of the fleeing.

They were all dead in a matter of seconds.

“Twenty one!” he grunted.

The runt howled in frustration, helpless to save her sisters. Slayer slammed his back into the wall, smashing the goblin. Not once, for she clung on for dear life, but three times. By the third she was thoroughly bruised. She fell off, landing on all fours like a cat. Slayer spun around to slice her, but the goblin bolted out of the chamber. Slayer's machete cut through air and slammed into the wall.

“Damn!” he said. He pulled a throwing knife and hurled it at her. “Don't let it get away!” Priestess watched the little beast scamper by, as if frozen in a trance. The blade buried itself in the goblin's thigh. Though she shrieked in agony, she did not fumble in her flight. She scampered down an escape tunnel, and was gone.

Suddenly she was afraid. She agreed to follow him, to hunt, no, to kill the goblins. To revenge the evil they had done. He'd given an order and she just sat there like a helpless little girl.

The shrieks of the goblin children still echoed in her mind.

Now she'd done it. He was storming towards *her*. His blade was sharp and still hungry for blood.

“I'm sorry... I'm sorry...” she found herself mumbling. Would he hit her? Would he *kill* her? She winced, shutting her eyes, and covering her head. No...no...

He stopped short just past her, not bothering to turn his head. “It'll probably bleed to death,” is all he said before moving on. She stared at him. The realization that she was safe came slowly. She clutched her breast to soothe her pounding heart. Thank goodness.

He found the Witch's corpse and gathered her shawl. Though it was filthy with old sweat, mud, and fresh blood it would serve. He brought it to Warrior.

“Get up,” the command was sharp. The lad looked up at the Slayer unsure. He dropped the shawl on Warrior's head, and Priestess' heart gladdened. “We're going home.”