

THE DEATH SPARROWS

By

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LOGLINE: Two orc lovers see an omen of death and must race against time to warn their tribe of the impending doom.

EXT. VALARIAN FOREST - DAY

UDRIC FEATHERHEART, a young orc, lays on his stomach in the grass, propped on his elbows. He holds a pair of crude binoculars to his eyes. Next to him lies open a leather-bound notebook with sketches of birds and descriptions in Orcish.

Behind him, a mountain towers up to the clouds.

THROUGH THE BINOCULARS

A small blue and yellow bird flits from branch to branch. It pauses to sing a melodic tune, then flits again.

BACK TO SCENE

Udric sets the binoculars in the grass and jots in his notebook in tight, neat Orcish.

MAYANA (O.S.)

(loudly)

Come if you wish to eat.

UDRIC

(loudly back)

One moment.

Udric finishes his writing and looks back at the trees. Without the binoculars, the tiny bird is too far away to see in detail. Still, he smiles: it was a new find.

He hoists himself off the ground and collects his notebook and his long-handled axe. He trots off through the trees.

Udric comes out into a small clearing. He is slight for an orc, his muscle lean and his clothes simple but clean; none of the marks of war expected of his race.

Putting the finishing touches on their picnic is Mayana, pretty in an orcish way, but with the hardened muscles of a warrior. Her clothes stretch over her heavily pregnant belly.

Udric smiles at her and she returns the affectionate look.

UDRIC

I found it. A Yellow-breasted Finch.

MAYANA

Why do such pointless creatures enthrall you so, Udric?

UDRIC

They are beautiful.

MAYANA

Animals are for food or battle.

UDRIC

You sound like your father. Why must everything be made for war?

Mayana shakes her head and smiles. This isn't the first time they've had this discussion, nor will it be the last.

MAYANA

Come. Eat.

Udric sits and they begin their lunch.

Mayana takes Udric's notebook and delicately turns the pages. She smiles.

MAYANA

The way you write of them...I should feel jealous.

Udric laughs.

UDRIC

Of course not. The birds...they are beautiful. But not like you.

He suddenly becomes somber.

UDRIC

The humans cross our lands, bringing war, bringing death. Their ability to destroy seems to know no bounds.

(pats the notebook)

Should the worst happen, perhaps this will preserve their memory.

Mayana leans over and kisses Udric on the dark grey skin of his forehead.

MAYANA

You worry too much. Let us enjoy this day.

Udric nods and smiles, but his eyes still look haunted.

EXT. VALARIAN FOREST - LATER

Udric lies on his back on the ground and admires the birds as they dart through the canopy. He idly picks at his teeth with a knife.

Mayana leans on an elbow and caresses her belly.

MAYANA

It is something to feel this child
inside me. Moving. Alive.

UDRIC

I envy you. Not just for that joy,
but also as your father does not
wish for your head on a spike
because of it.

MAYANA

Then you better hope it's a boy to
carry on your blood.

He rolls over and cocks a brow at her. She grins.

MAYANA

I jest.

UDRIC

Your humor leaves much to be
desired if I am to spend a lifetime
with it.

MAYANA

The elders will make our union
complete and the child will be born
into a welcoming clan.

UDRIC

Your family will never accept
someone as weak as I.

MAYANA

It is enough that I accept you.

UDRIC

You jest yet again. Your humour
improves.

Udric starts to roll back over but spots a small blood-
colored bird out of the corner of his eye, perched at the
edge of the clearing.

It appears to be watching them.

Udric snatches up his binoculars and peers through them.

THROUGH THE BINOCULARS

The bird, black and white bird with bright red feathers on
its head and wings, stares directly at Udric.

BACK TO SCENE

UDRIC
(frightened)
Mother embrace me!

Mayana follows Udric's gaze, amused at his dramatic reaction.

MAYANA
It is a beautiful bird, Udric, but--

UDRIC
It's a Death Sparrow.

Mayana's amusement fades.

MAYANA
The harbinger of death? It's so
small.

Udric offers the binoculars and Mayana takes them, looking for herself. She lowers them, clearly upset.

UDRIC
*Where the red Sparrows fly, war
will soon follow. Harbinger of
death, destruction, and sorrow.*
(clears his throat)
They do not themselves kill. They
are an omen of death.

MAYANA
It is only one.

A loud screech makes them turn to see another Death Sparrow on a different branch. More screeches announce a large flock of them streaking through the sky above the clearing.

MAYANA
They fly towards the Stronghold.

Udric grabs Mayana.

UDRIC
Then death is not far behind them.
War is coming to our Hold. Our
home. I must try and warn them.

MAYANA
Do you think to leave me behind? To
await this death?

UDRIC
The road will not be safe, Mayana.

MAYANA

My mother was heavier with me when
she followed my father into battle.
(tosses him his axe)
You will need me to keep you safe.

Udric nods. He stuffs his notebook and provisions into his small leather srip along with a water skin. Mayana slings her bow and quiver across her back. Udric hefts his axe.

Satisfied that they have all they need, they dash out of the clearing in pursuit of the Death Sparrows.

EXT. BASE OF THE MOUNTAIN - LATER

The trees grow sparse and the terrain rocky as Udric and Mayana reach a wide dirt path at the base of the mountain.

They pause to rest.

Ahead of them, the path forks: one way leads around the base of the mountain, the other to a set of rough hewn stairs carved from the rock, leading up and out of sight.

Death Sparrows sit atop every outcrop along the stairs and the bare branches above their heads, watching them intently.

Mayana drinks from the waterskin and passes it back to Udric. He takes several greedy gulps and puts the stopper back in.

Mayana points at the stairs.

MAYANA

We should take the path through the mountain.

Udric eyes the Death Sparrows warily.

UDRIC

Look at them, Mayana. They await something here. We must go around the mountain.

MAYANA

Around the mountain? It will take a day or more, Udric! You yourself said we must move with all haste.

UDRIC

I know! Even if these Death Sparrows did not block our path, the dwarves would never allow us to pass without a toll.

And we have nothing of value.
(looks at Mayana's belly)
Nothing I would dare part with.

MAYANA

Then we should tarry no longer. Try
and keep pace.

With that, Mayana lopez away down the path.

Udric takes a last look at the stairs. One of the Death Sparrows screeches as if warning him to stay away. Udric glares at the bird and jogs after Mayana.

EXT. PATH - NIGHT

Udric and Mayana run side by side in the moonlight. Mayana's breathing is more labored than Udric's and she slows to a walk. She clutches her stomach.

MAYANA

Please, Udric. I must stop.

Udric pulls up and looks down the path, wanting to continue, but turns back. He unstops the waterskin and hands it to her. She pours water down her throat.

MAYANA

I am sorry.

UDRIC

No, no. I need rest as well. We can
make camp away from the path. I've
been told bandits roam these parts.

Mayana follows Udric into through the sparse tree line.

EXT. VALARIAN FOREST - NIGHT

Surrounded by dense shrubs, Udric tends a small fire. He breaks the leafy parts off a tree branch and tosses it in.

Mayana sits near the fire cross-legged, admiring Udric.

MAYANA

I like the way you build a fire.

He frowns at her and she giggles.

UDRIC

Should a warrior like you make such
a sound?

MAYANA

I practice for motherhood.

Udric laughs and pokes the fire. Satisfied, he joins Mayana and hands her a piece of dried meat from his belt pouch.

UDRIC

We don't have much but this should stave our hunger for a time.

MAYANA

You should give me yours. I eat for two, you know.

Udric isn't sure if she's joking or not, but Mayana can't hold a straight face for long. He bites off a chunk of meat.

MAYANA

I will hunt in the morning and we can have a proper breakfast.

UDRIC

This journey around the mountain has taken longer than I had hoped.

MAYANA

You fear that already we may be too late?

UDRIC

I do. But we must try.

MAYANA

They do not follow us, Udric. We have not seen one since the fork in the path. Perhaps they have gone another way.

Mayana is cut off by the screech of a Death Sparrow. It is answered by another and another. All sound close.

UDRIC

They follow, Mayana. They herald death. We may be ahead of their flock, but--

MAYANA

Perhaps this death is not meant for us.

UDRIC

Our people have been locked in war since they were dreamed into existence.

We wage war against our fellow orcs. We war with the dwarves. Now, we war with the humans.

The screech sounds again, this time from the trees above. Udric looks up and sees glowing eyes peering down.

UDRIC

We are a people that court death with every waking breath. I do not question if these sparrows mean death for us.

He looks at Mayana sadly.

UDRIC

I just wonder how many they have come to take.

Mayana's eyes glisten with tears. His tone is so forlorn, she's not sure what to say next.

MAYANA

Come, Udric. Let us sleep. We have much ground to cover tomorrow.

Udric nods and lays back on the dirt. Mayana lies next to him and they drift off to sleep together.

EXT. VALARIAN FOREST - MORNING

Udric is woken from his sleep by the screech of a Death Sparrow. He sits up and spots the bird on a branch, watching him. It screeches again.

Mayana is gone. Udric suffers a moment of panic before he remembers that she was going to hunt this morning. He laughs at himself.

UDRIC

(to the Death Sparrow)

You must have me on edge, my friend. She's a good hunter. She will not be long.

The bird flaps its wings in response. Udric goes about rebuilding the campfire.

The sun climbs.

Udric paces the clearing, worried, unsure of what to do.

UDRIC
Where are you, Mayana?

The Death Sparrow screeches and flaps into the air. Udric watches it fly away and his face goes from worry to outright fear. He picks up his axe and the leather scrip and follows the bird out of the clearing.

EXT. PATH - DAY

The mountain still looms above Udric as he trots out onto the path. The sun beats down through the sparse trees.

He stops to drink and finds that there is little water remaining in the skin.

Something in the hazy distance catches his eye. He grabs his binoculars and looks through them.

THROUGH THE BINOCULARS

A body dangles from a leafless tree along the roadside, too far to make out any detail. Large dark birds circle above and swoop in to feed.

BACK TO SCENE

From behind, he can hear the call of the Death Sparrows. He turns to look and is startled to see the large flock far behind, winging in his direction.

UDRIC
Perhaps we are not too late.

He turns and jogs towards the tree and the body.

As he draws closer, he breaks into run.

UDRIC
No!

Mayana dangles from the tree by her wrists, head hanging limply. Her stomach has been cut open and her entrails dangle to the ground.

Crows pick at the body and swoop in to tear chunks of flesh.

Tears streaming down his face, Udric cuts her down. The body tumbles to the ground, sending the crows airborne in an angry flurry of black feathers.

Nearby, flies buzz around a tiny form lying still in the dirt. The sight of it breaks Udric emotionally.

He falls to his knees and cradles Mayana's lifeless body. His sobs ring loudly off the side of the mountain.

EXT. ROAD - LATER

The sun has started its descent from the sky as an exhausted Udric places a final stone on the cairn he has built around Mayana's body.

A tiny cairn is next to it, the stones stacked carefully.

He kneels.

UDRIC

May the Earth Mother welcome you
home, my love.

He touches his fingers to lips and heart. A screech overhead announces a Death Sparrow, who lands on the branch of the tree.

There are words carved roughly into the trunk of the tree. Udric walks over to it. He understands enough of the language of men to read the scrawl: "ORC SCUM ROTS IN THE SUN".

UDRIC

Were they bandits, Mayana? A
scouting party we missed?

Udric looks up and meets the Death Sparrow's gaze with a painful anger on his face.

UDRIC

You. It was you that brought these
men, these humans, to slake their
thirst for death at my expense. And
for what? What is it you gain,
winged beast? What do you gain from
stealing her from me? From stealing
my child? Answer me!

Udric hefts his axe and chops at the tree until it topples to the ground. The Death Sparrow, frightened from his perch, sits atop Mayana's cairn.

Udric snarls and takes a step towards the animal, his axe aloft, when the ear splitting screeching of the flock of Death Sparrows startles Udric. He watches them soar overhead, a chaotic mass of red, black, and white feathers.

They move steadily past, hugging the mountainside, until they disappear around its edge.

UDRIC

You may have for-stalled me for a time, villain.

The Death Sparrow leaps into the air and flies quickly after the rest of its flock.

UDRIC

But you will not yet claim victory.

Udric snarls and sprints down the road after the birds.

EXT. MOUNTAIN RIDGE - SUNSET

An exhausted Udric stumbles up a small ridge, the mountain now behind him. He's made it.

His Hold burns. The large, walled village with thatch-roofed buildings nestled in the valley down below is consumed by flames, sending a column of smoke into the sky.

Bodies lay in heaps around the crumbling village walls. Udric doesn't need his binoculars to know they are dead orcs of varying sizes. Not even the women and children were spared.

Nor does he need them to recognize the army surrounding the village and setting fire to the crops.

The screeches of the Death Sparrows are deafening as they wheel and tumble above the destruction.

UDRIC

Humans. I'm too late. But how?

His eyes follow the line of men up to the mountain side, where they trot down a stairway carved from the rock.

UDRIC

I should have listened. We should not have gone around the mountain.

Udric hefts his axe.

UDRIC

Let there be at least one we can save.

He runs down the ridge but cries out in pain and stumbles to the ground. An arrow juts out of the back of his thigh.

He grimaces with the pain as he snaps the shaft and manages to get back to his feet again. He turns to see where the arrow came from.

He only has a moment to see two human soldiers pointing his way before another arrow streaks through the air and embeds in his chest. He stumbles into a large rock jutting from the ground.

Udric slides down the rock awkwardly. He snaps the second arrow off, but the damage is done. He leans back, his breathing labored.

Udric manages to pull his notebook from the leather srip. He leafs clumsily through the drawings and descriptions of birds until he finds a sketch of Mayana.

UDRIC

Ah, Mayana. I failed. Forgive me.

He caresses the drawing, smearing it with his dark blood.

Another arrow thunks into his chest just below the other and he slumps over. The notebook falls to the ground.

As the life flows from him and into the earth, Udric blinks tears from his eyes.

UDRIC

I wake from this dream, Mayana. May
I see you and our little one soon.

A screech above his head calls his attention. He looks up and sees a single Death Sparrow watching him.

UDRIC

(weakly)
You did your job well, my friend.

The light in Udric's eyes starts to fade.

The large bird cocks its head, then leaps into the air. It wheels around and finds its way to the rest of the flock. As the humans continue their destruction below, the Death Sparrows soar away into the sky.

Udric's head slumps forward.

The pages of the notebook flutter in the wind.

FADE TO BLACK.