

# Unremembered Loss

*For all the news and information from the world of Rathrae, and for the story Unremembered Loss*

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## One Step Closer

The church bells rang out. Not with the joy of a wedding, or the sorrow of death, or even the insistence of an impending service. The bells rang out in panic.

From all over town they called. They called for the guards to man the walls. They called for the workers to rush in from the fields, for the mothers to find their children, the holy-men to pray and the little ones to cry.

I heeded the bells' call to the walls. I took hold of my bow and quiver and left my mead half drunk. I fought the throng surging the other way, seeing the fear in their eyes, hearing the questions on their lips.

The walls was manned, the gates secured, when I scaled their heights. The countryside held all its beauty, but also wisps of black and grey. A score of fires that did not mark chimneys, but the houses they once served.

I saw no enemy. I heard no battle cry. The smell of death did not lay heavy on the fields.

Fear was all I saw. The fear of the farmers rushing towards town. The fear of the men and women who stood with me – young recruits who never thought that war would come on their watch.

We stood the rest of the day – watching as the last of the farmers reached the safety of the city's walls, as the gates were locked and bared.

We stood and watched as one. None thought to leave their post. Not for food or water. Not to check on loved ones. We stood and watched.

I'm not sure what we watched for – the enemy didn't come. The murmurs from the street below, the tales of attack and fleeing didn't reach us – perhaps we stood and watched because we didn't have the courage to descend into the truth we knew those stories must hold.

The day raced towards its end. The fires that marked where joyful families once resided burned out with the sunlight, replaced with a gloom deeper than any fall evening as it beckoned Winter's quick approach.

With the setting of the sun some of those standing with me sat upon the ramparts in exhaustion, but not a one left. Town's folk brought us bread to eat and water to drink, but each of us who felt called to the wall by the bells stayed through the night.

As the sky lightened in dawn the weariness of a night of watching was evident. The captain called some of us away – off to meetings or off to rest. The rest of us continued to watch.

After noon I was told to rest. As I climbed off the wall I realized that the bells had stopped and that I had no idea when they had. A day had past that I could not account for. All I knew was that I had watched.

The next week was filled with the same. Days of watching – of waiting for the enemy to attack. They didn't come. We sent out patrols. Some came back having found nothing but the destruction of farm and home. Others didn't come back at all, disappearing into the countryside around us.

Most returned with tales of hoards of monsters – of ten for every man. No matter the size, the patrols were always out numbered and forced to flee, but still no attack came to the town.

In apprehension the town held its breath and waited. Each day the spies sent out returned with reports that the hoard grew in size. Each day we all knew that the end was one day closer.

On the night of the new moon the waiting ended. As the town slept a fitful sleep the first rocks sailed over her walls. The damage was small in terms of life and building, but great in the taking of morale.

The archers quickly drove the attackers back. As they retreated into the night, they left the fields aflame behind them. The town breath a sigh of relief at the brevity of the attack, but only because it didn't see the uncountable number of enemy that had come knocking.

Each night the hoard returned. Each night it became bolder. Each night it took a greater toll.

War had come to Maple Grove.

By Douglas Clarke

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This is a prequel to the novel, *Unremembered Loss*, which begins after the war is underway.

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