

The Blush of Dawn

"The carrion-fowl gather."

"Aye, ever has it been--the blood of men, even ere it be shed, acts as portent for beasts and discerning wizards."

Two stood on the escarpment, sidereal illume a mere glint on the broad cuirass of the one, the greater--the other a slender but eager shadow, bairn of the mighty man of war, nervously playing the string of his yew bow like a virtuoso on his cithern. Father and son, fear in absentia, awaiting the first blush of dawn, and the wet thud of steel cleaving living meat. There was no moon, and a haze and a mist dimmed the stars so that the gloom became a palpable thing to breathe in and belabor lungs. Though they could see no more than a yard or two, a sub-audible murmur, a subtle tremor of the earth beneath their booted feet, bespoke of a vast host encamped on the plain below.