

At the Point of a Sword

By Alexis Clapperton, grade 7

Tap. Tap. Tap. Evren watched the drops of water drip down from the grubby ceiling and collect in a murky brown puddle at the corner of her even grubbier cell. She was so terribly bored, and the drips so oddly enchanting, that she failed to register the footsteps of an actual, living person until they were only a few steps away from her. Based on the steady; *thump. Shufflethump.* Of the footfalls, even in the dimly lit dungeon she was trapped in, Evren could tell it was General Verek. He was usually a tall, intimidating man, but his crippled leg made him shorter. Her cracked lips twisted into a vague smile at the memory of her fellow soldier and partner, Willow, as they shoved their dagger into his leg, and twisted it, cutting through a nerve. The sound of his screams were music to her pointed ears.

“Elf. Elf! EVREN!” She jolted back into the present. Her smile turned into a wince, as her jump caused her to move, and she was completely sure that at least three of her ribs were broken.

Of course, she wasn’t sure of anything anymore.

“Stand up.” The general snapped. Evren shot the man a weak glare. A week ago, she could have stood up. But now, her body was too battered and bruised, the chains too heavy on her raw wrists and ankles; she could barely sit down. The general limped into her cell and grabbed her chin with his calloused fingers. Looking her in her blank blue eyes, he hissed, “I will break you, *elf.*”

Evren feebly yanked her head away from the disgusting scrap of a man in front of her. Her face was slick, covered in her own blood.

“You won’t.” She whispered.

“What?”

Evren raised her eyes to meet his.

“You will never break me, *human*.” She spat at General Verek’s feet. His face grew more and more red. Suddenly, he was lifting her up to her feet, and she cried out in agony as flames of pain licked at her ribs. Dropping her, he stepped back, wiping his hands on his dusty pants. She closed her eyes, bracing herself for the sharp sting of the whip lashes on her back, but opened her tired eyes when it never came. She stared at Verek (she refused to call him *General* anymore), who was smirking, and idea flashing through his cold eyes. Slowly, keeping those eyes on Evren’s, he gently pulled out a long, thin, *sharp* silver sword. For a minute, Evren thought that this would be it. The end of everything. And to be honest, she... didn’t mind it. If she did die now, then at least she would die knowing that she kept all the Elves’ secrets safe. But wait- Verek briskly walked to the guard who was behind the bars in front her cell. Evren frowned. He hadn’t been there at the beginning of Verek’s visit- was he? He started whispering under his breath to the soldier, who couldn’t be more than fourteen. The guard looked a little confused, but pulled out his own sword and handed it to him. This sword looked flimsier, but still seemed to be made of decent quality metal. Verek spun on his heel to face Evren.

“Listen here, elf. I’ll give you one chance to save your pretty head. A battle, between you and me. If you win, you survive. If not... well... let’s just hope it doesn’t come to that. Blood takes forever to wash of these old stone floors.” He kept on smirking, and the rusty tactical gears started turning in Evren’s head. Even though she was going insane, she realized that, if she did manage to hold her own long enough (she was *way* too weak to even think about winning), he could send her out to battle, front line, and distract her fellow soldiers. Before she could finish her thoughts, he tossed her a sword. The small bit of sunlight caught the metal of the sword and made it shine, turned into the sun, and the grimy floor turned into *the soft grass of the training arena in Griweth. Evren caught the sword tossed to her and faced her opponent. Willow. The dazzlingly scary person who was the captain of Evren’s regiment.*

“Alright. Ready?” They asked. Evren nodded, smiling. Quicker than lighting, Willow lunged in her direction, and she barely avoided being skewered. Evren laughed and held up her sword in time to block Willow’s next strike. Evren admired Willow’s dance-like fighting style; the way that they twisted and twirled across the training ground.

Suddenly, they swept Evren's legs from underneath her, causing her to crash to the ground, and Willow pointed their slim silver sword at her ribs. Silver sword? Willow's sword was gold with an amethyst pommel... wasn't it? Evren blinked again, and Willow turned into Verek. He loomed over her, his sword pointed at her shuddering chest. Keeping the sword pointed at her, he barked at her to stand up. Evren did, albeit haltingly.

"Less impressive than I thought you would be, elf." Verek sighed. "But you are still of some use to me."

Evren frowned, confused. Her mind was moving very sluggishly, and it was hard to process information.

"You said you would kill me if I lost." She said, holding her side and gritting her teeth. The pain of her broken ribs was coming back even sharper, as the adrenaline wore off. In response, Verek grinned wolfishly. Who knew he was such a good fighter for a crippled *human*.

"Well, elf, I never said those words exactly." Evren's heartbeat roared in her ears as she realized what she had to do.

Thump.

He would send her to distract and confuse her fellow soldiers... and her friends.

Thump.

Some *maybe* more than friends.

Thump.

She had to save them.

Thump.

She had to save Willow.

Thump.

Therefore, she had to sacrifice herself.

Thump thump.

Evren took a deep, steady breath, and straightened her back, lifting her shoulders.

Thumpthumpthumpthump.

“Long live Queen Willow.” She stepped forward, feeling the tip of the sword slip through her ribs for only a moment, and then everything went dark.