

Small feet were leaving footprints in the snow. They belonged to a boy, walking all alone, transparently devastated. On a chalk white land, vandals put their signature in red with the dead people's blood. Silence was coldly cutting the boy's hearth along with the icy weather. His clan was exterminated.

All of a sudden, the boy fell to his knees. The piece of bread he was holding was now stiffened like his brother's dead body that was beside him. The boy took out the bear teeth necklace from his brother's neck and crossed it onto his.

There was a fire, continuously burning in front of their tent regardless what happened. The boy's eyes were lost in there. And he did not notice his mother, running towards him, screaming in agony. Instead, the yellow-red flames engulfed his thoughts.

The name of that boy was Ottok.

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At the brow of the steep rocks of Freljord, several Avarosan kids were warming up their marshmallows over the burning fire. Ottok was one of them now and his neck was empty. The tribe was nice enough to accept them, allowing them to make a clean break. 'Forget everything,' his mother was recommending, unaware of the growing revenge that Ottok was feeding. He had a chip on his shoulder about not having been able to protect his family. 'That day was yet to come' he thought, taking another sip from his milk. All he had to do was to be patient.

With his milk barrel that he started to carry around a short time ago, Ottok became the focus of interest of the other kids. Seti, a beastly boy who much larger than a kid his age, thought it was time to learn the reason.

"Hey, why are you drinking milk like a mama's boy?"

"To defeat the Ice Witch when I see her again." Ottok found the most reasonable motivation in calmness. Even though he was just a kid, he had the maturity of a man.

"You saw the Ice Witch?" Wigo, with a pet moose alongside him, asked.

"Then how come you're still alive?" This time, Euthali, a blonde girl with a crossbow in her backpack, had a question.

"Maybe he used his sister's rag dolls to bring her down." Seti took the floor again. They all laughed.

"Or maybe he threw snowballs and scared her off." Wigo straightened his glasses, having an unsuccessful attempt to get attention.

"No, Braum saved me!" Ottok yelled at last. All chatter cut to silence, ready to hear the rest. They'd all heard stories about Braum, but none had encountered him yet.

"That was the day I lost my necklace. A heavy storm was coming, but I couldn't care less. I left the house, started to hike up to the hill, hoping to find it. When I stopped to catch my breath, I realized I went too far. The heavy fog was blocking my vision, the wind was trying to

blow me off. I had nothing to eat, nothing to sit on. So, I leaned against a rock and snuggled my coat more.

“A glimpse of hope sprung in me when I heard a noise, until a black shadow emerged from the fog. I went weak at the knees, short of breath. I knew that the Ice Witch came to sentence me to death.

“I wanted to fight with her, but my arms and legs were numb. I couldn’t move even if I wanted to.” Deep down Ottok knew that it wasn’t true.

“She reached her glowing hand out to me, draining my energy. I closed my eyes, let myself go.” He even selfishly felt happy, it was his brother, he was about to see.

“I waited, and waited...

“Then...

“With a great rumble, the earth was shaken. I opened my eyes on impulse and saw that a long icicle road was coming towards me. Before I knew it, I was driven away backwards, but the Ice Witch was trapped in the icicles. And several inches away from me, a big, mustached man came out of the fog.”

“Braum!” Wigo screamed. Ottok cracked a smile.

“He took me to his farm. The weather was warmer there and his cottage smelled like cinnamon. ‘Are you cold?’ he asked. I nodded. I was freezing. ‘You like goat’s milk?’ he shot another question, motioning me down in front of the fireplace. Then he laughed at me when he saw me grimacing. He was sweet. ‘Drink goat’s milk. It will give you strength,’ he demanded and poured the white liquid into a gargantuan size pot.

“I took a sip from my milk. It wasn’t as bad as I thought. ‘Good?’ he asked and I nodded once more. ‘I wish I knew you before’ I said, fighting with my thoughts. He settled next to me. ‘Some things need to happen.’ He was talking nonsense.

“‘Am I going to be strong like you if I drink milk?’ I asked. ‘The strongest one.’ He laughed, but I stayed silent. That’s when he bent over to see my face. ‘Whatever you were looking for out there...’ He pointed my heart. ‘...here,’ he said.”

Ottok took a deep breath before he continued.

“After I finished my milk, my eye lids became heavy. It was peaceful, so I let my body rest on his chest. When I woke up, I was at home.”

A moment of silence dominated the air until Seti jumped. “Pff. You could’ve made up a better reason.”

“But that’s what happened.”

“Yeah, yeah. Almost had me though. Come’on guys, it’s getting darker.”

Everyone packed their things to leave. Euthali put her hand on Ottok's shoulder.

“For what it's worth, I liked your story.” She smiled and left.

Ottok downed his milk and eyed the hill. The weather was cold and clear. He put out the fire and watched the smoke rise into the air.

He smiled then. If nobody believed him, that was okay; he'd found what he was looking for anyway.