

We stood over castle's front wall, waiting. Darkness had loomed over us like hungry devil. Only our wavering torches kept it at bay. Chill of the passing wind tended to severe us which we withstood somehow, however the chill of our hearts was hard to withstand. Hundredth time I glanced over my shoulder towards east. The old commander standing over leftmost watch tower was also lost in the east darkness. In fact, every single man who could look towards east was turned towards the direction. Little was the hope we had from east but then little was the hope we had from what was approaching us from front. I could clearly hear the uneasy nervous breathing of knight standing near me.

This wasn't meant to go this way. We had already been refused help from either of our allies. We were on our own. That had been clear in the first place. Pride was our country and bravery our religion. If we were to die, it was to be warrior and if we were to live, it was to be warrior. Standing tall however requires courage. Especially, standing tall with fifteen hundred against eight thousand. Standing tall when half of your fifteen hundred were old men and children. Standing tall when you were hope of all those people who had been assured safety. Standing tall when your love had kissed to leave you for forever. And standing tall when your fall would mean fall of your country.

Flash of lighting across sky like sparkling snake enlightened the vast landscape before us for a second and then vanished. I felt the handle of my sword with my numb fingers and clutched it tightly. They were approaching. Another hour and they would be upon us. Tense shivering of stretched muscles against metal cladding of knight clearly reached my ears. Time to move had been called upon.

Battalion of just name that constructed of seventy two swords men looked anxiously at me as I climbed down stairs of outer rim of castle's first wall. They looked anxious but not afraid. For there hopes, I had no answers. I nodded and just walked down towards main gate of castle. More soldiers standing on both sides looked with mute eyes towards me to speak. Speak that we had been saved, speak that help had arrived. But there was none and I spoke of none and just moved on. Reaching near main gate, I turned back and looked at shimmering faces of ready to die men. Somehow finding my voice, I ordered the first paladin battalion of my three hundred best warriors to take their positions.

Strategy was simple enough. Or simply speaking we didn't had any strategies. It was all do or die barbarian tactic we had to go forth with. Handful of battalion of archers were going to be their first barrier till they finally reach the main gate and then gate was to be our sole protector till it would be brought down. After that, *fight till death*.

Time had such a wings, I never realized before as on that doomed night. Footsteps of thousands approached our beloved city. Thundering made mockery of our plight. Tense faces in the torch light in that hard winter night, clad in iron helmets gave queer appearance. Final preparations began.

There were shouts all around in the castle. Soldiers were finally being put in every frontier possible. Running to and fro was going on necessarily or unnecessarily. Gate of inner rim was being shut. I quickly glanced inside as far as I can see and as long as I can see for I was never sure of ever crossing that gate again. I looked at dim shape of inner palace, and I looked at the dust on which I had passed so many days. When I could finally look back, half of my army was looking in the same direction. There were tears in many a eyes and that hurt me. These were tears of one of the hardest warriors to ever live on earth's surface. My own eyes never spilled a drop but then my heart had been damp with tears, her tears.

A firm hold on my shoulder suddenly called me back to this world. It was first military general, along side whom I had fought many wars before. His mere look gave me confidence. If bravery and skill was ever slaves of somebody, they must had been of this man. Even in this grim situation, he looked at least dejected. In fact he hinted a smile and spoke in his heavy voice “just for a second think what they will do once you are down and that will bring back you, even from death.” I tried to make some reply but he had already moved away, moved away to take his own position. That was when I heard first battle cry.

Enemy was within firing range and call to archers had been made. Repeated shouts of “Take your aim....., ready....., shoot!!” were all we can hear standing down there. Angry war cries, like rising from flood of warriors were approaching us nearer and nearer on the other side of gate. Our archers were proving way too less against their gigantic force. A thud caused me to look back from main gate. A young archer was lying near end of entrance gallery. There attack had begun. Thousands of footsteps which now had broken into running, now loomed ever closer and first hit on the main gate was made. I ordered men into position. Metal clanged as we took positions. Swords were withdrawn, clutched tightly in fists. Soldiers performed their last ceremonies. My second general kissed his wrist band as he approached me. “Sire, the arrow might be too dangerous a charge for you to lead.” I smiled back “we are above the position of deciding dangers” and withdrew my sword. I had ordered my battalion into arrow charge with soldiers forming wings of arrow and myself being the tip. A brute squash on gate waved its timbers. We all knew, another blow and it will fall to pieces.

For last time, I faced my soldiers and was surprised to find that they were ready now, come what may, life or death. I felt quite proud to be commander of such a men. Looking straight, with my sword held high over my head, I said what I have always said before plunging into any war “Forget what you had been, forget what you had tried to be but remember that you are the soldier standing for the country, country which is not just a piece of land but your mother.” It followed tremendous hooting and passionate cries of my army but not for long. Harsh sound of giant cracking gate fell on my ear. Time had come. I kissed ‘her’ soft tender memory and charged across our last broken barrier, never to return back.