MONSTER STORY:
BASILISK

Damn this place, damn the beasts, damn my own foolishness. “You make mistakes, little one, you pay for them”.



That’s what me pa used to say – usually before a slap. Pa was never wrong. Damn him to hells too, along with the rest of it all. Let them eat their black hearts out – I am making it out of here one way or another, don’t care whose bodies I step over on the way.

“Crafty, little one, you’ve got to be crafty” he’d say. Wonder what he’d think of this dagger I made. Ugly piece of work, all jagged and rusty, but with the right amount of anger and strength it stabs well enough. Leaves deep cuts going out too. Used some of the goblin’s skin for the handle – the little bastard whimpered as he bled out. Can thank his buddies for bashing my idiot companions’ heads in.

The exit can’t be far now – I have retraced our path, through the crumbling ruins, past the strange statues – whoever thought that these poses would make for good sculpture. The bandages should hold, soaked with blood as they are, and I am ready to slit the throat of any critter that tries to hold me back.

A sense of unease slowly settles in as I walk past these contorted figures. Two hobgoblins here – whoever would make a statue of these? Feel like something is watching me, following. Clenching my teeth, not letting the panic take hold I spin around, trying to locate my pursuer. The giant six-legged lizard-like monster is certainly no master of stealth – awkwardly perched atop a crumbling mossy arc its forked tongue is darting in and out, anticipating a meal. Not so fast, you overgrown gecko.

“Look for a weakness, little one” – said pa – “every armor’s got one, every bastard, no matter how tough, will bend over if you get the right spot”. So, I do, as it stumbles down, regaining its footing, studying me. The neck. Definitely the neck – thin and vulnerable – if I get to it, the thing is dead.

Only now do I notice its eyes – wispy yellowish trails rising from these, as if drawing my sight. I can’t help looking at these and as I do I feel my muscles tense up, breath stopping midway in my chest. What the bloody hell is this? I focus and shake it off, my red hair getting in my eyes. Now is not the time. I exhale sharply and launch myself at the thing, blade at the ready. A snap of its teeth – the thing is prepared to defend itself, but I am faster as I slice its ugly mug as I lunge past it – it hisses as it spits purple blood. Didn’t get the neck this time.

The glow of its eyes grows more intense and I can’t look away. I stare at my hand in disbelief, losing all control of the muscles. Is it the dim light here or is my maimed flesh starts turning stone-grey? With a growl I slice into the hand, drawing blood in a long uneven cut – that gets the feeling back and the stiffness subsides. The pain is jarring but the warm blood trickling down my fingers brings strange comfort. Another gaze like that and I don’t know if I can keep moving.

Mustn’t look at it but how do I get to something I can’t see. Guess what, pa, it’s time to be crafty again. I furiously wipe the blade down so that the rust and the dried blood peel away, making vague reflections appear on the dull metal surface. Let’s see if I can follow you like that. It’s awkward but its gaze no longer shackles my body. The beast sees it and angles for a charge – its claws and teeth are powerful enough even without the gaze. In the reflection I see it bolt awkwardly, off-balance, but closing in at surprising speed, scratching at the cavern floor.

I wait for what I know will be my only chance. Just as it’s about to chomp down I spin and get around it – an erratic slash of its claws knocks the blade out of my hand but I’m right there by the neck. The weak point. I grasp it in a lock with both arms and apply the entire weight of my body to a powerful, desperate pull, using its forward momentum against it. I growl as I hear the bones break and the beast goes limp in my embrace. Breathing heavily, I come around and give it one last kick right smack into the center of its skull – my boots are steel-tipped and I hear another loud satisfying crack, as the wisps of yellow smoke exhaust themselves, leaving me with one last sensation of stiffness. I bend over to catch my breath, hands at my thighs, my body aching. Spitting in disgust at the monster’s corpse I turn to continue my trek back to freedom.

Except I can’t.

I stumble and fall as my left foot refuses to budge. Grasping it, feeling around it feverishly I realize that instead of my flesh I am feeling cold hard stone. No, no, no, no – I feel the lifeless, rocky texture crawling up my calf ever so slowly as I lose feeling. Chained to one spot I look around in desperation, and find my blade lying on the floor.

A terrible moment passes in absolute, deafening silence, as a dreadful solution comes to mind. I swallow.

I rip what’s left of my sleeve and prepare another bandage. There will be lots of blood. Clenching my teeth hard I brace myself against a boulder and firmly grasp my jagged blade. Your little one sure learned how to get crafty, pa. You’d be proud, old bastard.