

*... what sacrifices must be made?*

A little ways away the pavilions of the knights had been pitched, all of bright, varying colors, reds and yellows, blues and greens. Into the largest of these stepped Ilress, and behind her entered two men bearing the body of Ventharn upon a litter, laying him at her feet. At the other end of the tent Kalan was seated on an oaken stool, Ralknor standing at his side.

"Ilress of Thamswood, from the second vanguard, my liege," said Ralknor to his lord upon her arrival.

"Ilress of Thamswood," Kalan began, "it is mainly to you that we owe our victory this day. Therefore, what is it you wish of me?"

"Lord Kalan, this is my betrothed, Ventharn of Faldweck," Ilress indicated the body by her side. "He joined your ranks that he might repay his grandfather's debt to your father. He pledged to die in your service or fight until you released him from obligation."

"I remember him," Kalan nodded.

"Then I wish all here to bear witness," she said, and knelt down next to her beloved. Ventharn's breathing had grown so shallow as to be almost unnoticeable. Ilress took a dagger from her belt and, her vision blurring with sudden tears, drove the knife into his heart.

*Don't miss the full story of "The Silent Host" by Andrew Marini, appearing only in the Autumn 2018 issue of Startling Visions Magazine.*