

Excerpt from Guardian of The Stone Book 1 of The Verities Silex (Fantasy Novel)

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Eager to be the first out of the storm, Linka moved further and further ahead. Xalane could barely see her when it happened. Without warning, Linka felt the snow beneath her feet give way. She screamed but only for an instant. Snow filled her mouth as she tumbled head over heels down the steep slope. Damp white powder filled her eyes, her ears, her nose... She couldn't see... She couldn't breathe... She was falling... Falling... She tried to cry out but only managed a muffled choking sound. *Kren...* She landed hard and lay sprawled out on the snow. Air, she needed air... *So sore... Kren... Please, help me...*

A massive form began to materialize out of the swirling snow. It moved forward easily despite the drifts and the winds. It was strong. It could see and hear what others couldn't. Its prey was near. The creature licked its lips in anticipation, it had been too long since it had last tasted human flesh...

With a tremendous effort Linka managed to force herself up. Her head was spinning from the fall. Gulping down air, she frantically looked around. A scream froze in her throat... The creature before her was almost invisible, its shaggy whitish/gray hair blending in perfectly with the snow. Four thick arms, tipped with long sharp claws, reached out towards her. It must have been around twelve feet tall... A mouth, big enough to bite her in two, opened wide, revealing rows of bloody teeth.

Linka tried to draw on her magic. To cast a spell... Any spell... But the world was spinning around her and the magic kept slipping through her hands like water. She numbly watched as the creature's arms moved closer and closer. She tried to cry out but the words wouldn't come. *Is, this the end? Please... Kren...*

"Yahhhh!!!" a figure flew through the air over Linka's head. Cold steel glinted in the dim light as a long blade severed the monster's neck. Linka squirmed back as red snowflakes bounced off her coat. Then, silently, the headless beast toppled forward, its claws landing only inches away from her feet.

"Are you ok?" Kren straightened up and wiped the blood from his sword.

"Yeah..." Linka tried to stand. Kren was instantly at her side, his arms around her... "Thank you."

"Nothing broken?" he peered off into the blizzard.

"I don't think so." she flexed her arms. "Even my bow is in one piece."

"That's good." Kren's voice was serious and cold as the gale. "You may need it."

More dark shapes, all as big as the first, began appearing. They were surrounded. Kren backed towards Linka, ready to protect her till the end. She frowned and returned her bow to its harness. Too much wind... Once more she tried to call upon her magic, this time it worked.

"I'll distract them, get ready." she began chanting a spell.

Kren nodded and drew on his own magical power as well. While fighting with swords and magic at the same time was nigh on impossible, he could at least toss out a few fireballs before the melee combat began.

"Pyretorium!" Linka shouted the last word and thrust her hands up towards the sky.

Giant balls of fire began falling from above, each exploding in a brief flare when it hit. The beasts howled frantically and tried to dodge the raining inferno. Kren, careful to avoid the flames, threw out several spells of his own as he charged the nearest fiend. One swipe sliced off an arm. Kren leapt high into the air as the hairy mass swung at him, bounced off its arm, and

drove his blade through its chest. Before it could fall, Kren's sword was free and he was charging the next one. Linka was in danger; Vengeance/Defender was in its element. Kren cut down a second monster, then a third. It was only then that he noticed that the fireballs had stopped. One of the smarter beasts had hurled a giant snowball at Linka's back, knocking her down and interrupting the spell. Several of the fiends had already congregated around her. Even as Kren ran towards her he knew that he would be too late...