

## why does the corpseflower bloom on your back?

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# why does the corpseflower bloom on your back?

by [Courier\\_Eight](#)

## Summary

"Finlay was one of the few survivors of the Battle of Aeonia, who in an unimaginable act of heroism carried the slumbering demigod Malenia all the way back to the Haligtree. She managed the feat alone, fending off all manner of foes along the way."

## Notes

A huge thank you to Ao3 user Rockets for thorough edits for this one. She writes lovely stuff, so be sure to give hers a read too at <https://archiveofourown.org/users/Rockets>. <3

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

The first thing Knight Finlay was aware of was an itching, putrid and foul in her very lungs.

She came to consciousness without peace; without that slow fade in as darkness turns to colors and shapes. Finlay came to, and immediately she retched. She dug the fingers of her gauntlets into the dry Caelid clay and, doubled over, she coughed and heaved until that itching and burning came pouring from her mouth in an awful stream, filtering through the grate of her helmet and pooling and dripping into the earth.

As her eyes adjusted, as the smell became too awful to bear trapped inside her helmet, she tore it from her head and tossed it aside with a clatter. Those rattling coughs continued as she spat out the last dregs and tried to gulp down clean air, even though there was none to be had. Everywhere she looked, she was surrounded even still by a red haze, a cloud of spores that surrounded those fallen and standing alike in that awful, wasted place.

And then, looking back down to her knees, she saw it.

As she brushed strands of matted blonde hair from her eyes, right next to her palm she saw what she'd expelled from between her still burning lips.

It was a pool of scarlet.

Blood, yes; but something else too— caustic, wretched, rust red with an opalescent sheen. She met that something else with a weary resignation, but not surprise. How could it have been? She and her sisters had sworn their oaths and pledged their sword arms in light of this very eventuality.

For every Cleanrot Knight pledged to Lady Malenia would one day bear her scarlet mark, and suffer as she suffers.

And now, it seemed, her turn had come. The first steps in a long march towards putrefaction and rot, for which there was no cure. She knew that even as a lass, dreaming of chivalry and knighthood. And the day Malenia had knighted her in her service, when the demigoddess herself had brought her sword arm to touch each shoulder and presented her with her sword and scythe, it had still been the proudest day of her life.

The realization of her illness only spurred on yet another realization; one far more pressing. Her pale eyes darted around the battlefield as cold panic shot through her body, searching past her writhing sisters and the soldiers of Radahn, past trees shorn of their leaves from the blast, through that horrid cloud that billowed out from the place where Malenia and Radahn had clashed. Sprouting from a colossal crimson bloom, from which every spore that choked the landscape billowed. A bloom that stretched high enough to claw at the very firmament.

Malenia herself was nowhere in sight. Then, only then did cold fear claw at the bottom of her stomach. All at once, Finlay was consumed with the need to find her, to ensure her safety. (She didn't let herself think *'her survival.'*) All thoughts on herself or anyone else could rot like the rest of them for all she cared.

Adrenaline granted her jellied limbs strength. She almost cried tears of relief when grasping hands closed around the handle of her scythe that, for a small miracle still remained at her side. It, at least, had not been taken from her. With a grunt of exertion, molars clenched tight in her jaw, she planted its handle into the ground and push. With every movement her dull gold armor creaked as she rose herself onto unsteady legs.

With her eyes on the horizon she pushed herself onwards, further into the haze where that scarlet flower bloomed, blotting out the blue of the sky.

Every step she took was a nightmare. The ground was littered with bodies, as they all writhed under the all-consuming rot. Her sisters, Radahn's men, all howling in incoherent agony. Those poor souls who had been left behind. It only made sense that those who could had already turned tail and ran.

It was nearly impossible to imagine the battlefield being as subdued as it had become, deathly quiet besides the low rumble of those death rattles. For almost weeks it had been the worst kind of stalemate, bloody and grinding as their army shoved the Starscourge General's troops further and further back; out of Limgrave and onto the Caelid plains. To the heart of his territory and the base of his power. And it was there their campaign had frozen, just past Fort Gael. And while they had the heart of their army laid bare and beating in the Plains of Aeonia, for all their trying they couldn't seem to pierce it.

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The night before had found Finlay and her sisters huddled around a map of the battlefield, moving around small clay figures, modeling strategies to try to figure out how to break that ironclad line. They'd been at it for hours, and Finlay was fit to drain the flask at her hip if they kept up much longer.

"What if we feinted northwards, then circled around and took Sellia?" Knight Annora plucked a little figurine of a Cleanrot Knight from the board, and circled it all the way around the line to the back. She set it down in its new position with a solid *clack*, as if the gesture had been the cleverest thing performed in the history of the world. "We'd have him pressed between two fortified positions, and would force him onto an offensive on both fronts."

Finlay gave an exasperated sigh and snatched the piece right back, turning it over between her fingers.

"It would never work." Her voice was stern as she eyed that little figurine. Whoever made it had even taken a length from the scarlet tuft at the backs of their helmets, to affix in miniature on the figurine's own. A twee little flourish, if ever she'd seen one. "We would we be wading into a nest of sorcerers."

"*Civilian* sorcerers." Annora added, a wry grin on her grimy face. "If they are anything like their kin in Raya Lucaria, then our victory is as good as won. All we'd need to do offer them control of their little fiefdom once the dust clears, and watch how quickly they toss their rulers out on their arses."

Finlay felt her mouth drawing into a line. Annora had devised the winning tactic to rout Godrick's soldiers in Limgrave, and, Miquella grant Finlay patience, she'd been riding that

high ever since. And all because she could outsmart a sniveling princeling, she fancied herself a master tactician. Even though, as she recalled, it was Malenia who had him groveling and kissing her prosthetic feet, not Cleanrot Knight Annora.

“The people love Radahn.” Finlay finally did take a swig of birchwine from that flask of hers, chasing out one bitter taste with another. “We forget that at our peril; especially when we’re the invading bastards marching through his territory.” She set the piece back down at their current location with a resolute *click* of her own. “Even if we could take the city by might, we could not hold it for long enough for it to be of use.”

Annora scowled. “Well, alright, Finlay. How about you use that vaunted wisdom of yours and show me a better plan, hm? Or would you have us bash our heads against Radahn’s host for the second fortnight in a row?”

It was probably for the best, then, when Malenia herself pushed her way into the officers’ tent—immediately quelling the air of frustration in the room. A smirk came unbidden onto Finlay’s lips at the sight of her Lady having to bend over to fit her considerable height into the tent, the golden wings of her helmet scraping against the fabric canopy. If Malenia noticed her reaction, she did not acknowledge it.

“I’ll be leading the charge tomorrow.” Malenia’s low voice had the astonishing quality of being imminently authoritative and utterly nonchalant at the same time. “March along side, if you would. We will slay his men until he rides out himself to meet us. And I will end him.”

Finlay was struck by how matter-of-factly she spoke. It was like she could see the world she’d make with her deeds already, and was simply describing it, the details completely rote to her. As always, Finlay hung on her every word, and believed with her whole heart in the future that Malenia saw.

After all, that had been how she’d always led them, and she had never led them astray. She and her fellow commanders would argue tactics, advance strategies, mobilize troops: all so at the appointed hour, Malenia would take the field and slice the knot that had deviled them in two. It was those moments where Finlay truly felt the most alive.

And fate had brought them to the cusp of yet another one of those moments, as Finlay and her sisters walked by Malenia’s side into the orange light of the Caelid dawn, marching under the scarlet banner of the Haligtree. Finlay held her head high, her half-halo scythe and piercing sword held out as a badge of honor. The symbols of her knighthood. And when she looked out at the hordes of Radahn’s men who held the plain before them, she couldn’t help but grin. They’d tell stories about this day, she was sure of it.

Of the day Lady Malenia took the head of the man who arrested the stars.

At their vanguard, with nary a word, Malenia leveled her sword arm forwards, the joint connecting it to her prosthetic arm letting out a clink that cut through the silence that had settled between both armies. Finlay let out a warcry as her sabatons bit into the dirt and she charged headfirst into the fray. Her sisters joined alongside, and the fighting was on in an instant.

She truly felt invincible in that dull gold plate. The soldiers that had closed the distance enough to strike with their meager short swords would find no purchase; only a flurry of thrusts from Finlay's sidearm. Everyone else she kept well at arm's length with that scythe, forming a deadly ring around her that Miquella himself would have been proud of,. Despite the fluidity with which she moved, Finlay couldn't hold a candle to how her Lady, fleet of foot, carved through every man that attempted to bar her path. If Finlay simply trudged through the battlefield... Malenia, Blade of Miquella, danced.

It was almost hard to track her movement as she weaved in and out with her dull gold blade, a blur of gleaming metal and crimson fabric and that wild red hair that cascaded out from her helmet like she was a shooting star. And if Finlay was protected by the resiliency of her armor and the strength of her arm, Malenia was protected by being completely untouchable in the first place.

Fighting alongside her she could feel her blood singing in her veins with each swing of her scythe, losing herself in the twirling arc of its curved blade. Perhaps a touch of Malenia's gracefulness had rubbed off on her, each swing flowing like water as that half-halo swung around shields and carved into flesh. The tide of men was strong and unrelenting, yet with unflagging strength she parted those red waters.

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They must have been fighting for hours, yet the burning in her muscles and the smell of dust and blood only made her feel that much more alive. She could go on like this for days, she reckoned. But just as Finlay had planted her boot on a man's chest to dislodge her sword from his body... she realized the battlefield had suddenly fallen completely silent.

And when she turned around, she saw him.

General Radahn, the Redmaned General, the Scourge of the Stars himself.

His size beggared belief. She had heard rumors of him being a mountain of a man, but 'mountain' seemed to be more of an accurate descriptor than she'd thought. Malenia was taller than Finlay by a matter of two feet, and yet Radahn, in his armor engraved with the imagery of lions, made her look like a porcelain doll. Even one of those ebony greatswords on his back must have been at least three times Finlay's size. So distracted was she by the man's sheer mass that she didn't notice the horse underneath him at first. She balked. It was a scrawny old nag, and yet it grazed at a patch of scrubgrass completely unbothered. By all laws of nature she knew, the horse should have been reduced to a smear on the ground under that horrendous girth.

Finlay swallowed dry in her helmet at the sight. She must have been staring, because she hadn't noticed movement until an arm knocked against her breastplate. It was Malenia.

"Take your knights and hold the line here, Finlay." She said, her voice soft and even. "Let me handle this."

It instantly put Finlay's racing heart at ease.

(At least, it did in terms of fear. Her heart was simply racing for other reasons now.)

While she watched Malenia take measured steps away from her and her sisters, the eyes of every soul on the battlefield were moving with her. No doubt each and every one, regardless of allegiance, were trying to etch the sight in their minds. It would be a tale to tell their children and their childrens' children, if the fates were kind enough to return them to their homes tonight, and not the roots of the Erdtree. And oh, how that smile grew on her lips, as Malenia walked off to the distance, into the shadow of that colossus. Radahn's fearsome presence would only make her Lady's star shine all the more once she bested him.

Besides, Finlay had been blessed enough to march alongside her Lady for years on end, through campaigns beyond counting, and in all that time she had come to know one thing beyond the capacity for doubt.

Malenia, Blade of Miquella, had never known defeat.

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How, then, had everything gone so wrong?

As each plodding step carried her past bodies in droves and in piles, it all somehow didn't feel real. As if someone else was wandering through this hellscape besides her. It was a sight so abhorrent, running so counter to every battle they'd shared before that it felt to Finlay like the sheer surreality of a dream. But even she couldn't ignore the hand that closed around her ankle.

Her eyes shot down and her scythe arm tensed, before she realized that the hand that gripped her was clad in unalloyed gold. Its owner was one of her sisters. Armored in gold tarnished red, the woman's gaze was not following her arm. She must have grabbed her without looking as her head lolled limply against the earth.

"Please... help me...! It hurts....!" The woman's voice was garbled, an anguished and slow croak that rattled out from the grate of her helmet.

"I know, sister." Finlay's voice sounded surprisingly clinical even to her own ears, as she took a knee besides her fallen comrade. "I know."

Her hands closed around the bottom of the woman's helmet. She figured that it would be good for her to at least see the sky in her final moments. But as she lifted it from her shoulders, Finlay wished she hadn't.

"Order's light...." The swear came under her breath, as the woman's helmet slipped from trembling hands and clattered against the dirt and rock.

The woman's face was mostly gone. Drooping, sloughing off in a scarlet sludge. Her head was, by now, nearly a puddle with teeth. Anything that would have identified her to the world had melted away.

"Finlay...?" She croaked, and there was a cold pit in Finlay's stomach when she realized it was impossible to discern her voice anymore. It too was rotting, putrefying in her lungs. "Is that you...? Why can't I...?"

Finlay opened her mouth, hoping that the right words would miraculously come pouring out — but it was moot. Her jaw would have hung agape anyways, as she watched in horror as the rest of the woman's head, like an overripe tomato, succumbed to gravity and splattered onto the Caelid clay. Bile burned in her throat as she murmured a little prayer, taking just a moment to fold the woman's arms over her chest and to reverentially place her helmet back against what was left of her neck.

*May her soul fly on swift wings to the Haligtree, to be born anew with her people.*

Finlay could waste no more time here, lost among the dying. Numbly, mechanically, she plucked the woman's thrusting sword from the ground to replace the one she'd lost, and carried it onward to the place where the spores were thickest. To the very base of that tremendous scarlet blossom.

It had sprouted with such a tremendous force that it appeared to be planted in its very own crater.

Each step she took brought Finlay lower and lower into a veritable lake of rust red sludge. Its color and consistency... it looked just like her fellow Knight's head after it had splattered across the dirt. Finlay tried her hardest not to think about what it was she was trudging through. Here, at the heart of all horrors, the thick clouds of stinging spores burned her lungs as she continued to breathe them down. They choked like hands around her throat, but at that moment she did not care. Even as she coughed hard enough to where her chest felt like it would cave in two, she still walked, stepping onto a scarlet petal and walking its length down to the flower's heart. She had already resolved to not stop until her Lady was safe, or until her legs could walk no more. Whichever she saw first.

And in that blighted place, in the very core of that dreamlike blossom sprouting out of a sea of decay, Finlay's heart plunged when she found her. Draped in clinging petals and the tatters of her armor, shorn of her sword arm and—Finlay realized with horror—her very legs, the demigoddess Malenia lay motionless and alone.

“Lady Malenia...!” Each ragged word was punctuated with a coughing jag, and she couldn't tell whether it was her wheezing or her heart that was making the tears that burned her cheeks. With pure desperation she threw herself to her knees, pulling the woman into her arms, shaking her by the shoulders in the hopes that it would rouse her. Finlay could practically see it; any second Malenia would open her eyes, and with her unshakable calm reassure her that all would still be well.

Malenia was utterly limp in Finlay's arms.

“Please... you can't be...!”

It was too much to bear. Choking through sobs and spores alike, Finlay buried her head into Malenia's chest, pouring a grief she had never imagined out into the tattered fabric of her Lady's gown.

This was it. After years and years of trials and struggle and *joy* at Malenia's side... here was where it would end. All that was left to do was take her back to her home for a proper burial,



and hope that the rot would take her swiftly.

What was life, shorn of duty so?

She wept for an eternity, until the spores had set in her line of tears to etch the path they had streaked down her cheeks. It was only when she'd finally ran out of tears to shed that she realized she'd felt her Lady's chest rise and fall in a fluttered, shallow breath. And she'd heard Malenia's heartbeat.

"Thank goodness..." Finlay murmured, crying tears of a completely different sort now. "I thought I'd lost you...." Her voice came out in trembling breaths, even as she spoke to a body that heard her not. She allowed herself this one moment, tears cutting through the grime and clinging spores that coated her face, to sit in that overwhelming relief. Her Lady yet lived, and her life still had meaning.

But they couldn't stay there. Even though there was no sight of Radahn, and chances were that the Starscourge General was now just part of the lake of rot surrounding them. It was doubtful any man could have survived being that close to the blast. But regardless, she knew they wouldn't be safe out here, beset by enemies that would eventually come to investigate, outnumbered and completely alone. They had to regroup, rearm, resupply. There was no way they'd be able to complete their mission alone.

And even if she had to carry her all the way back to where the Haligtree bloomed at the end of the earth, she would walk the path gladly. And if it was to be the last act she would perform before the scarlet rot claimed her body and mind and all, then so be it. A nobler end she could scarce imagine.

So, delicately, reverently, Finlay draped Malenia's remaining arm around her shoulder, and hoisted her up onto her back.

And with her Lady safe in her arms, Finlay, Blade of Malenia, began to walk.

## End Notes

Thank you for reading! Truly, if you enjoyed what I wrote, that's all I need, and reward enough. <3

I'm currently raising money though for an emergency move out of a bad living situation, unfortunately, so if you enjoyed the fic and would like to help out, my ko-fi's over at <https://ko-fi.com/vermillionwind>. Every bit helps.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!