

Salem State University
School of Graduate Studies
Department of English

Death unto Bloom
The Beginning of the End
A Screenplay

By

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NARRATOR (v.0)

Hubris is when humans play God and try to extend their reach to what should have remained unobtainable. Hubris destroys Noble Houses, plagues history with tales of the follies of man, and leaves a legacy for the affected to clean up - if they survive.

A still image appears, done in the style of a medieval tapestry piece. A man, cloaked in furs and an ornate robe, stands proudly as he is surrounded by a fine, icy fog. He appears to be giving a speech to a crowd of young students. Behind him, four apprentices stand behind him, also cloaked in similarly-styled yet less ornate robes, their arms crossed behind their backs in unison. Also on the center of the stage is a corpse.

NARRATOR (v.0)

Long ago, in Southern Kojikani - the Deadlands of the continent where life dares not come into fruition, Urien Tablatov was the most powerful man on the face of Makadia. He mastered an art, a form of art many had believed was an impossibility to be created from human hands.

Urien, the robed man giving a speech, suddenly shoots what appears to be icy bolts of lightning from his fingertips at the corpse. The corpse twitches, violently shakes, and then bursts into an abomination made of ice. It stands at the ready as the crowd applauds.

NARRATOR (v.0)

Frostbane Magic

An army of similar-looking creatures marches across the streets of a kingdom, laying waste to those in the way.

NARRATOR (v.0)

Urien was a genius ahead of his time. He was also the biggest fool who valued his own ambition above

all else. His home, Frostgar, was well on it's way to conquering all of Southern Kojikani. Through means unknown to us, even today, he acquired Frostbane Magic and used the secrets he unearthed to turn Frostgar from a nation of conquerors, to a nation of decimators.

A young couple is seen cradling their young child, who is covered in icy blue veins with extremely pale skin, as if dead, but is alive and well. A nurse, her hands tainted blue with Frostbane magic, stares on in happiness.

NARRATOR (V.o)

Urien was as much of an innovator as he was a ruthless scholar. He taught Frostbane magic to countless Frostgardians, his influence and reach ever-expanding. In time, those gifted in the art of death weren't just using it to conquer, to create affronts to man, but to heal the sick, save the dead, and otherwise twisting it to fit benevolent purposes too.

Urien is seen standing before a crowd, honored as he receives the title of Borean Frosmagus for his feats accomplished with Frostbane magic.

NARRATOR (v.o)

Urien was viewed as a living legend, a god among the mortal rabble of the world. He had not only conquered a feat many thought the human body was incapable of, but transcended life and death and taught others to as well, with little preparation and mastery on his part. Many Frostgardians were overjoyed to count him among their people.

The same shot of Urien standing before the crowd before, only with his apprentices fading in the scene one-by-one,

each of them staring at their master with barely concealed contempt for him. From facial expressions alone, you can tell something is being planned behind the scenes.

NARRATOR (V.O)

Except for among his four prized apprentices, the four he entrusted to teach the next generation of Frostbane wielders. Their potential squandered and failed to flourish under his tutorship. While he enjoyed praise and accolades among Frostgardian society, his four apprentices thought they deserved far more than their current lot - and turned on him.

A violent flash. Urien lays prone and helpless as his four apprentices barrage them with the full extent of their power. He screams in pain as icy lightning tears into his body and flash-freezes both flesh and bone. His apprentices all staring down at the carnage with faces of pure hatred.

A closeup of Urien's face as he goes from screaming, to calmly accepting his death as he closes his eyes and grunts through the extreme pain.

NARRATOR (V.O)

They killed him. that man was betrayed by the four prodigies he had entrusted his practice, the future to. Of course, the most famous - or infamous - Borean Frosmagus would never go down...

Suddenly, Urien's eyes flash open. They are blue, translucent, and glow brightly.

NARRATOR (V.O)

...without establishing a legacy none would forget.

A single explosion bursts from Urien, freezing the flesh off of his ungrateful apprentices. The explosion decimates all of Frostgar, and most of Southern Kojikani. The resulting shockwave surges across the world, a ripple effect that

covers a majority of the world in a thick blanket of snow - a medieval fantasy nuclear winter.

NARRATOR (V.O)

Urien's Requiem, so we call it now. Our entire world, our own personal icy hell in the span of just a few seconds. It is why the so-called "Sol" is a mere rumor, a remnant of what was taken from us. It is why Urien's pet Cieslani - twisted and inhumane creatures of ice - wander freely amongst the lands, wreaking havoc to the unfortunate. It is why humankind as we know it has been on its knees for years, waiting for salvation that has all but abandoned our grasp, never to be seen again.

FADE TO:

INT. BIERNET HALL - NIGHT

The narration ends and cuts to the present. The hall that the speech is being held in is lavish, well-decorated, although showing signs of crack and decay that indicate possible neglect. We are introduced to the narrator of our opening tale, a disheveled, yet somehow still handsome nobleman - JOHANAS BIERNET. A handsome, if troubled nobleman dressed in expensive, yet poorly maintained clothing. He looks exhausted, yet keeps the audience captivated with his theatrical storytelling and undeniable charm. He paces back and forth as he holds a glass of wine. The speech takes place in a grand hallway, with enough room to fit hundreds, and is finely decorated.

JOHANAS

The road to where we are today has been long. It has tested our resolve, our spirits, and has revealed that some in the beautiful Kingdom of Rostkov, have loyalties that lie elsewhere.

Cut to a younger man in the crowd, SI-U. He is dressed in gaudy and tacky-looking expensive clothes and a ridiculous hairstyle. He nods along as he listens to Johanas, showing interest in his speech but keeping a straight face.

JOHANAS

As we all should be aware - or so I hope if you have been paying a close eye to Rostkovan politics - today marks the one-year anniversary since the end of the Rostkovan Uprising...the very same that claimed the lives of Tatiana and Boris Biernet, my dearly departed parents who were unjustly executed by dissidents for the unforgivable act of loyalty to Queen Roksana.

The camera cuts to the back of the room, where QUEEN ROKSANA, a portly woman in finely-tailored clothing and a solemn, mournful look on her face sits in a dignified chair fit for a queen. Next to her, her advisor, LUCIAN ALEJANDRO ILLESCAS, writes away in a journal with a quill pen. He stands a safe distance behind the Queen, attempting to make his presence in the room downplayed, refusing to acknowledge the speech being held.

JOHANAS

As the new head of the Biernet Noble House, An extensive list of my accomplishments would bore all of you far more than my theatrical and sleep-incurring sleeps.

A slight chuckle spreads across the hall where the speech is being held, at this attempt of a joke.

JOHANAS

Still, while today might be the anniversary of a new era, it also marks the painful rebuilding process our beautiful kingdom has undergone. The story I told, however, served as a reminder, reminding us all of why everyone here, fallen or not, still lives on.

Johanas lifts his glass of wine into the air, a celebratory gesture.

JOHANAS

Because we walk the fine line
between life and undeath every
dusk and dawn, a duality that
requires precise footing to keep
our balance steady.

Everyone in the room follows suit with raising their glasses.

JOHANAS

To life after death! The only life
worth living!

Everyone cheers, Johanas takes a sip of wine as he continues to pace.

JOHANAS

Now go! Enjoy today! Live
deliciously, do something you'll
live to regret, find beauty in all
the worst life has to offer.
Because dying tomorrow with
regrets means the reaper's coffers
grow extra heavy.

At the announcement of festivities beginning, a small orchestral group plays music that is fit for a subtle, relaxed evening. The guests soon disperse and wander among the hall. Some stopping to grab food and drink, other breaking off into conversations with one another, others breaking off from the crowd to observe everyone else.

Johanas sits in a chair away from the crowd, sipping on a glass of wine. One button of his shirt is unbuttoned, and his shirt is slightly tucked out of his pants. He looks more disheveled and casual compared to how he looked during his speech.

Si-U sees Johanas sitting away from the crowd and goes over to speak to him, also holding a glass of wine that is mostly untouched.

SI-U

Ah, there you are! Took me a while
to find you, was scared that if I

shoved the wrong person aside I
would contract an unexpected cough
two days later...

Johanas does not look amused, sipping his glass of wine as
he doesn't break eye contact with Si-U.

SI-U

Oh! Right, great speech by the
way! But do you always have to be
so...theatrical? This entire room
would have applauded if you were
as straight-forward as you are
flamboyant, though you could say
complete gibberish and every Noble
House would swoon and falter.

Johanas has drunk his glass of wine in a single gulp. He
coughs to clear his throat as the strength of the wine hits,
covering his mouth.

JOHANAS

Si-U, Si-U, Si-U...you come in
wearing *periwinkle* and *purple* in
the same outfit, and you would
call me "flamboyant"? I..I am
wounded.

Si-U looks down at his outfit, looking ashamed and
embarrassed for a moment.

SI-U

Actually, actually it's...Opulent
Periwinkle and Gaustier
Purple...my mother picked it out
for me.

JOHANAS

You are twenty-six, you need to
stop relying on your parents for
everything - especially when
you've been the one everyone's got
their eye on through your own hard
work alone.

SI-U

Well, yeah, I'm not going to argue with my parents...they know what's best for me.

Si-U's eyes shift around the hall until they land on his adoptive parents. They are mingling with fellow nobility and laughing.

Johanas rolls his eyes, and leans his head to the side to cough. This catches Si-U's attention again. As Johanas talks, his speech begins to slur - he can't hold his liquor.

JOHANAS

Well, normally you come to me for political advice...and it hasn't failed you yet...sooooooo, what do you wish to ask of me, Si-U?

Si-U looks uncomfortable at how fast it took for Johanas to get this drunk. This clearly isn't the first time he's seen Johanas in a state like this.

SI-U

Oh, uh, I was just wondering...well, I was watching your speech. Normally during speeches I like to take notes, as a guideline to tell me how to act when I give speeches, and honestly the way you conducted yourself on stage was...it was incredible.

JOHANAS

Weren't you just giving me shit about how I'm "too theatrical"? Yet suddenly you want to be more like me?...yessssss, very curious indeed.

Johanas takes another swig of his wine. A long one, the entire glass is empty by the time he's done taking the sip. He wipes his mouth and turns his attention back to Si-U.

JOHANAS

Do you wanna be like me, Si-U? I got a lotta knives pointed at my back...people waiting to strike, people waiting for me to get soft

so they can get the killing blow
on me. You want advice? Don't be
like me at all! Be
you...beeeeeee...Si-U!

Si-U frowns.

JOHANAS

Also I uh, I made that speech up
as I went. Know the story of
Urien, heard it so many times,
especially when Cieslani attacked
Biernet territory, years
ago...dredged up bad memories of
shit I do not wanna have to see
again! I'm just...stressed. This
is the one night where I can
unwind, and let my guard down...

Si-U sighs, and looks away from Johanas, feeling second-hand
embarrassment at the current state of his friend and mentor.

SI-U

I...I mean...actually, you know I
always...well, now's a bad time,
I'll just, leave you here then.
Just don't be too hungover to
attend the church tomorrow.

Si-U turns around to walk away, leaving Johanas in his
drunken, rambling state, before stopping dead in his tracks
for a second.

SI-U

Wouldn't want the golden child of
Rostkov to show up drunk. Would
damage your reputation quite
harshly. You have quite the
station to live up to - I'd hate
to see you lose it so easily.

Si-U then continues to walk away. He walks past Lucian, who
is trying to move with the crowd's ebb and flow even as he
tries to make himself as unnoticeable as possible. He is
holding a small glass of wine and dressed in drab and bland
colors. He sees Johanas being drunk out of his mind and
delivers a disapproving glare from across the room - not

that Johanas is in any state of mind to notice it, as he unsteadily stands up and moves elsewhere.

Distracted, Lucian doesn't notice as someone puts their hands around his waist. It's BEKAH, a noblewoman clad in bold, expensive, and extravagant clothing whom Lucian knows on an intimate level - former lovers, now in a strange limbo between being friends and being completely unsure of one another.

LUCIAN

Bekah...

Bekah laughs slyly and moves to chat with him.

BEKAH

What? You barely cause a stir around here, you could at least make a little gossip - Lucian Alejandro Illescas, caught getting a little too cozy with his former lover...

Lucian rolls his eyes.

LUCIAN

Don't be stupid. You can be as playful as a fox whenever you want but uh...

Lucian leans in to whisper.

LUCIAN

Just don't do it here...people talk. You of all people should know this.

Bekah giggles and sips her wine.

BEKAH

I'd be sailing down the Ictori River if I didn't know when to make a move, Lucian. Just thought you needed a distraction - you were leering at the drunken court jester who stumbled his way into a position of nobility.

LUCIAN

Johanas is Johanas, but I'm not comfortable with you speaking his name like that - despite my grievances, he's proving to be quite the competent Noble House Lord...so far, at least. Three-hundred and sixty-five sunrises aren't enough to make an observant statement that isn't made out of a skewered opinion, Bekah. You should learn that.

BEKAH

Ah yes, the very picture of elegance. A man so broken up by the death of his parents who died kissing the throne, coping with fermented grapes, the finest men and women from the most expensive Rostkovan whorehouses, and theatrics that are more concerning than amusing. The Biernets are in good hands, I see - hard to worry about managing a Noble House when you're the only one left.

Lucian looks around the room, making sure nobody can hear him, before turning his attention back to Bekah.

LUCIAN

Not here, too many ears that would plot your downfall if they heard you spreading blasphemous rhetoric about the "golden child" of Rostkov. Walk with me.

Bekah nods, the two take a stroll through a part of the grand hall that has less people - most of the party seems to be drawn to where the music is. Once Lucian and Bekah are away from the majority of the guests, they can talk freely with one another.

LUCIAN

I see you haven't lost your boldness, Miss Bekah Kowalski. Your family, the lowest in the gutters of all of Rostkovan's Noble Houses, after being stripped

of your fortune for siding against the crowd. I still wonder why they let you and your father keep your head.

BEKAH

Roksana would rather see my family starve to death and die slow, painful deaths rather than kill us outright. I know the bitch queen well enough myself - she wouldn't want a quick death to rob her of the satisfaction of watching me suffer and lament upon my failings.

LUCIAN

And yet still you present yourself at one of the biggest gatherings of Noble Houses of this year. Badmouthing the host, nonetheless.

Bekah laughs, and sips from her glass of wine while flipping her hair.

BEKAH

These gatherings are boring, I was honestly hoping to get some...one-on-one time with you. You know, the "seduction" lessons I taught you. Although I'm assuming you haven't warmed the beds of any Calagenan Merchant Queens to secure an alliance with them - not yet, at least...Royal Advisor of the bitch queen sounds like a painfully dull affair, I assume?

Lucian groans in discomfort, shaking his head in disapproval at Bekah's choice of conversation.

LUCIAN

I know you, Bekah. Love and companionship are but transactional tokens to you. You make for a fantastic friend, but an unremarkable lover. Now, speak

freely and tell me why you're here.

BEKAH

Hah, always the dull one but willing to wind up the levers of everyone far more interesting than you for answers. Typical Lucian. But at your insistence...I'm here gathering gossip.

Lucian looks a bit more intrigued and invested in the conversation than he was moments ago. He leans in closer to make sure any potential guest don't eavesdrop into the conversation.

LUCIAN

Oh? Gossip? Is this gossip that'll shake up the state of affairs in Rostkov, dear Bekah? Or are you simply vying for my attention so badly, that you would make me drag you out here to achieve such a goal?

BEKAH

Self-centered behavior doesn't suit you, Advisor. If I told you this had nothing to do with you, would you be disappointed? A rhetorical question - one of your favorites.

While the duo is conversing with one another, a MAN can be seen in the background. He is dressed like a completely average and unremarkable nobleman - dressed fancily enough but also not enough to stand out from the crowd of nameless faces, except for one distinction - a scar running down his cheek. He examines Lucian and Bekah from a distance, as if evaluating them, before deciding to move on.

LUCIAN

You're stalling. If you have a motivation, tell me.

BEKAH

Only the most noble of motivations - trying to reestablish the

Kowalski Noble House into the graces of Noble House society. I don't have a solid plan, but do know Lucian, I trust you enough to tell you this.

LUCIAN

That's your plan? Waiting for someone to say something, and then just working from there?

BEKAH

You would be surprised at how far a little patience can get you, dear Lucian. If I make too many bold moves, I'll be executed on the spot by the bitch queen. The end of the Kowalski Noble House.

The scarred man seen earlier is seen progressing through the hall, making small talk and pretending to fit in among the nobility, undetected. As he is laughing and chatting, Si-U notices him in the corner of his eye. And then Si-U sees it - a concealed blade hidden beneath the scarred man's sleeve cuff. Like the fangs of a viper, waiting to be bared - waiting to strike.

SI-U

Son of a bitch...

Seeing if there's a way to distract the man, Si-U decides to intervene - he approaches him and pretends to know the scarred man.

SI-U

Aha! There's Mort! Mort! I thought you'd never make it. How's the estate coming along? I know the past few years have, probably, been rough on your Noble House, I assume.

The scarred man looks at Si-U. Confused and thrown off by the strange, eccentric man attempting to make conversation with him.

SCARRED MAN

Right, do I know you? My name's not even Mort - it's Kacper. You must have mistaken me for someone who probably looks like me. Off with you, now.

The NOBLEMAN that the scarred man was speaking with turns his attention to Si-U.

NOBLEMAN

Ah, Si-U! It's been a long while since we've seen each other. Was worried you and your family died during the uprising. Come! Have a drink with me! I was gonna go search for your parents and do a little catching up, oh how worried I was about you for all these years.

The scarred man gives Si-U a glance, relieved to have an impromptu distraction come his way. He excuses himself and descends further into the hall, his motivations unknown for now. Si-U can only watch as the mysterious man grows further and further away from him, realizing that he can't excuse himself from the conversation to hunt him down - staying behind to entertain the nobleman.

SI-U

Of course! It's been too long, and I was about to go search for my parents anyway. They're probably talking political games with someone, I'm sure we can entertain them with more riveting conversations. I'll follow you!

As the scarred man continues his unflinching walk, he scans the room for any sign of what he's looking for. He sees the chair Johanas was sitting earlier, now empty with a wine glass sitting on the floor, next to it. Johanas was here, at least at one point. The hunt begins.

Back in the more secluded area of the hall, Lucian and Bekah are still chatting about Bekah's plans for redemption - waiting for the right moment to make a move, as to not draw too much attention to herself in her quest to save her Noble House.

LUCIAN

You need to play your cards right, Bekah. I can't help you - not when I would risk my entire Noble House if I supported your endeavors.

BEKAH

And yet, you're giving me advice on how to conduct myself. Much curiosity. Is that a spark of rebellion in you that I can sense? Shocking.

LUCIAN

I don't feel like entertaining this, I shouldn't have even come here. I've stepped away from the queen's side for far too long - be seeing you, Bekah.

Lucian turns to head out, as Bekah gets one last word in before he leaves.

BEKAH

I'll take your advice to heart, dearest Lucian.

Meanwhile at the heart of the party, Queen Rokšana is picking at her food, surrounded by glasses of wine and her own personal honor guard. They stand at the ready in case anything happens that would endanger their queen. The scarred man wanders, camera focused on the hidden blade in his sleeve as suspense fills the air. Is this a bold move on the queen? In the middle of such a public space?

The scarred man sees the queen, heavily guarded, and acknowledges her presence - and then moves on and searches for his actual target. The queen doesn't even make note of him, preferring to be alone and unbothered as she turns to the head of her honor guard - ANASTASIA, a burly, beefy wall of a woman who bears the scars of battle on her face.

QUEEN ROKSANA

Szymon and Antoni would have loved this...

ANASTASIA

Yes, my liege.

QUEEN ROKSANA

Szymon loved music, always fond of string instruments...said they reminded him of the dinner parties his Noble House would host in the gardens, where they had the best music troupes in the continent playing for the masses...

ANASTASIA

I remember, my liege.

QUEEN ROKSANA

Antoni...oh Antoni...how all the sweets here would drive him mad and bouncing off the walls of his chambers...I should get a cookie from the sweets table and leave one in his room...it'll be the first time I set foot in there since...

Anastasia visibly feels pity for her liege, but as the strong arm of the honor guard, she has to steel herself to not let her vulnerability and sympathy for her liege slip through into the public eye.

ANASTASIA

Yes, my liege, I'm sure he would.

Queen Roksana looks visibly deflated. Not in the mood to celebrate, but rather in the mood to mourn what she has lost. She'll go back to eating and drinking and focusing solely on herself.

In another quiet corner of the hall away from the party, a very drunk Johanas is seen being carried out by his loyal butler, a sharply-dressed stern elderly man named STANISLAW. Stanislaw is reprimanding Johanas for his drunkenly behavior at his own feast.

INT. HIDDEN HALLWAY - NIGHT

STANISLAW

Sigh, I hope you are well aware that this day of festivities will continue despite your unbecoming state, milord. I am doing you a

favor by forcing you into bed so that you may have a chance to start tomorrow morning on a fresh note. Do know that I won't be this generous towards you again.

JOHANAS

Stan...

STANISLAW

I have watched over you since you could barely walk, I will not tolerate the mere idea of letting your behavior fly unchecked. You start fresh tomorrow and you will do your duties - I don't care if all of Rostkov adores you, you have made a fool of yourself tonight after such a promising start.

Footsteps echo in the distance behind the duo. Stanislaw pauses.

STANISLAW

By the wastes, who could be following us? I thought I told all the servants and attendants to stay at the feast. If I have to force my hand in order to get some order around here, so be it.

JOHANAS

Wha...?

STANISLAW

Milord, there is someone approaching us. I refuse to leave you unattended here in this part of the estate. Whoever it is-

Suddenly, the scarred man appears down the hall - breaking into a sprint as soon as he sees the duo.

STANISLAW

...time to get my hands dirty.

Almost as an instinct, Stanislaw drops Johanas to the floor in a risky move. He charges the scarred man and wrestles

with his bladed wrist, twisting his arm around before tearing the wrist blade out and tossing it across the hall. After a struggle ensues, Stanislaw manages to subdue the man in a sleeper hold.

STANISLAW

Not even a poisoned blade? My arm should be going numb by now. You work rather sloppily indeed, young man. I thought you assassins were far better trained, or perhaps recruitment was far less lenient when I was your age.

Stanislaw successfully subdues the man as he goes limp, lowering him to the floor as he lays unconscious. After wiping some dirt off his outfit, he'll deliver a kick the man's thigh, out of pettiness rather than unneeded sadism.

STANISLAW

That, young man, was for forcing me to do this in freshly-ironed clothes. No respect for the working class.

Stanislaw then goes over and picks up the blade that he successfully plucked from the would-be assassin. He examines it as he walks back to check on Johanas. The blade is rather simple - an unremarkable shape and design, but the jagged edges on the tip stand out. A blade made for bloodletting first and foremost, and the design of an eye on the center of the blade

STANISLAW

Not ornate, but rather dull and practical...hmp, you aren't just a ruffian hired by some Noble House to get rid of the competition, aren't you? No, you're something different - something that makes even me feel uneasy. Very well then.

Stanislaw turns to Johanas, and has a difficult decision to make - return Johanas to his room and risk letting this would-be assassin wake up and escape, or alert the servants and leave Johanas by himself.

With no time to ponder or waste, Stanislaw breaks into a sprint back to the party as fast as he can, leaving behind a drunken Johanas and the unconscious body of his attempted killer. In Johanas' point of view, we see everything as blurry. Stanislaw runs and starts out as a large, blurry blob. Slowly growing smaller as he makes his way further down the hallway.

JOHANAS
...Stanislaw...?

As Johanas gets that one word out, he passes out drunkenly on the floor of the hallway, letting out a slight groan as he drifts off into a drunken sleep.

INT. BIERNET HALL - MOMENTS LATER

Three servants are seen chatting to each other, a slight respite from the busy night. Until Stanislaw rushes into the scene, looking like he had just seen a ghost - and fought one too.

STANISLAW
You three, to the hall now. Keep this discreet, don't you dare let this slip to anyone else. This party is over.

As the three servants rush to attend to the incident in the hallway, Stanislaw takes to the stage that Johanas held his speech on. There, he picks up a plate and slams it on the floor as hard as he can, completely shattering it - A Rostkovan tradition to gather the attention of one's guests when needed.

The crowd hears it, and turns to Stanislaw as they await his words - shocked that the head butler of the Biernet Noble House would speak in his lord's place.

STANISLAW
I understand this must come as a shock to all of you. But in an hour, the festivities must come to an end. Lord Johanas Biernet has been feeling unwell for the past few days, and I fear his fever has overtaken him. It would be a great dishonor to continue the

festivities without him being present - therefore, when the hour ends, I would ask that you all leave the estate with haste. Until then, continue to enjoy yourselves.

Stanislaw steps off the stage, the crowd erupts in confused chatter and sheathed whispers. Stanislaw turns to the hallway and walks over to it, as Si-U rushes to walk and talk alongside him.

SI-U

Excuse me, Stanislaw, what is happening-

STANISLAW

Biernet Noble House secrets. Not your concern.

SI-U

I think I might know what was up with Johanas-

STANISLAW

Not your concern, young man. You seem rather obsessive over our personal affairs, although it is expected for someone who tries to pry into my lord's life. You might want to focus on achieving something of your own merit for once - a lapdog doesn't get far in politics.

Stanislaw storms off, leaving a stunned Si-U to stand there in silence.

Lucian mumbles under his breath at the announcement, before deciding to go back to the side of his queen, who is also confused by the sudden announcement.

QUEEN ROKSANA

Lucian, we are departing now, I cannot stand how this entire affair has gone.

LUCIAN

As you wish, my grace. We will
depart from the masses
immediately.

Lucian catches Bekah in the corner of his eye. She waves at him, foxily. Lucian pays her no mind.

INT. HIDDEN HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Two of the servants are seen tying up the scarred man, ready to bring him in for interrogation. Stanislaw and the third servant pick up Johanas and prepare to bring him to his bedroom.

STANISLAW
We won't be catching any breaks
tonight, we'll get this man to
confess even if it means he chokes
on his own blood in the process.

As Stanislaw prepares to get Johanas to bed and to get this man ready for interrogation, another servant rushes in looking panicked.

SERVANT
Sir! Sir!

STANISLAW
At ease, servant. Explain
yourself.

SERVANT
...Biernet territory was attacked
by Cieslani, an anonymous report
has informed us that the Cieslani
attacked with a ferocity not seen
in decades - the village of Zary
has been razed to the ground. No
reported survivors.

Stanislaw pauses, and then clears his throat.

STANISLAW
If this is true, *nobody* is to be
informed this has happened. Not
even our lord. You understand?

SERVANT

Yes sir!

STANISLAW

Exemplary. Now, off with you.

The servant runs off, as Stanislaw rests his head in his hand. This is a long night ahead for everyone.

CUT TO:

EXT. NIGHT - DESECRATED VILLAGE

A man's dead, frozen body lies standing in place. He is visibly agape, as if he wasn't expecting to die like this. He looks like a macabre ice sculpture, twisted and malformed with a thick, white fog seeping from his corpse. A faint wheezing and hissing sound can be heard from the frozen body.

A hand with intricate tattoos and talons for nails reaches out from the left side of the screen, laying a single finger on the corpse. A tiny burst of ice erupts from the corpse, and the hand jerks back.

The camera cuts to LARISSA, an overly curious and cynical woman with distinct red hair, covered in intricate and detailed tattoos, her face is one of colorful makeup and deep facial scars. She is holding her affected finger, shocked from the sudden jolt of pain she just experienced.

LARISSA

Shit! Damn. Definitely Cieslani,
no other creatures are capable of
doing that to a person.

In steps in TZILLA BLUMENFELD, a muscular woman wearing a pretty, but torn pink dress and a corset. She wears simple silver jewelry and a black eyepatch, which is partially covered by her long brown hair. Her most intimidating feature is the large blunderbuss, a short-barreled musket she is holding. She stares at Larissa disapprovingly.

TZILLA

You don't need to hurt yourself in order to make that observation. Whole place is a frosted graveyard, Cieslani have enough thoughts left in them to be sadistic enough to leave a village looking like this.

LARISSA

I see that clearly, it's just...there's so much decay here that it's making me uneasy and uncomfortable. I wanted to make sure this was real and not just...not just a bad dream.

Larissa isn't lying about feeling uneasy. Her eyes seem heavy and she's visibly shaky.

LARISSA

I feel...powerful, but I don't feel good.

TZILLA

Head back to camp if you must, if this is scrambling your senses we can't risk having you unfocused in case the pack that attacked are also smart enough to leave stragglers behind to surprise any investigators.

Near the two women, the upper torso of a half-frozen corpse begins to groan and move. It makes noises reminiscent of shattering glass as it twists and turns, seemingly preparing to transform into a Cieslani. Or worse.

Without missing a beat, Tzilla points her blunderbass at the creature and pulls the trigger. In an instant, the loud blast instantly shatters the Cieslani, sending shards of ice flying backwards, before the shards crash into the destroyed remains of a home.

After killing the monster, Tzilla reloads her blunderbass and takes a moment to readjust her hair.

TZILLA

Damned monsters. Death is a mercy
for their existence.

Tzilla returns her attention to Larissa.

TZILLA

Now then, you gave your scouts
order, yes? You aren't just
lolling about in the aftermath of
a raid, I hope?

LARISSA

Of course not, dearest Tzilla. My
scouts are searching for
survivors. Better we get here
before those damned holy warriors.
Rather have us be the ones taking
care of this, rather than the ones
who pretend to care about small
folk once something bad happens to
them instead of bickering about
inter-politics.

CUT TO:

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF DESECRATED VILLAGE - MOMENTS LATER

A man with a broken nose that never fully healed and scars
of battle all over his body stands over a half-frozen, dying
survivor of the raid. The survivor raises his mutilated arm
to the man, trying to beckon him for help.

LARISSA (v.o)

Besides, we should be thankful we
got Saad on our side. His
knowledge of how those holy
warriors operate let us avoid them
without worrying about being
captured. Even if he came with his
own...well, I suppose even I can't
deny how much betraying Sretomir
costs someone.

DYING MAN

Help me...

The man towering over the dying survivor looks distraught at
the scene, yet carries himself like a gallant paladin

instead of a merciless brigand. He closes his eyes and looks away from the grizzly scene, before opening his eyes and returning the dying man's stare with a resolute look. The last look the dying man will ever see.

SAAD

I apologize, my dear friend, but your tale has reached it's bittersweet ending. At the very least, I can return you to Sretomir's Garden. Your soul will bloom eternal among the blessed. That much I can offer you.

DYING MAN

Would...would like that...wife...wife and daughter are...

SAAD

I will return you to them. You three will have nothing to fear. You will be in the comfort of the Eternal Bloom.

Saad then pulls out a small pouch of dead leaves and sprinkles some over the dying man. He frowns at this.

SAAD

I apologize for not being able to give you proper rites, but I am making do with what I have at hand. Your soul will still find root in The Garden, friend.

After sprinkling the leaves on the dying man, Saad will unsheathe his sword. It is worn down and in a bad state of disrepair from years of use and neglect, yet when the dying man sees the patterns on the sword, resembling vines adorned with roses and thorns, he smiles in comfort.

SAAD

Father of Roses, take this man into Your Eternal Garden. Cultivate a paradise for Your Faithful and let his name pass Your lips, as you exert judgment and Your majestic presence on this

man's deeds in life. Allow space
for him to grow where he has
fallen, and may his sacrifice help
Your cause of exerting vengeance
on those who have intruded on Your
Garden.

Saad lifts his sword up, staring down at the man one more
time, who gives him a nod of approval. Saad brings the sword
down and ends the man's suffering for good.

SAAD

There, it is done-

Saad's upper back suddenly burns in agony. The sound of
flesh rapidly decaying echoes in the air, flesh turning
sloppy and falling off, followed by the petrifying of
decaying meat into a mummified state. Throughout this, a
disturbing tattoo of a raven is visible through Saad's
armor, decaying and changing shape to reflect the process.

SAAD

Fuck! Gah...why does it always
have to strike like this-?

And then suddenly, all is back to normal. Saad can breathe
once the extreme shock of pain passes. He looks up to the
sky, the bleak, gray, and clouded sky, and lets out an
exhausted sigh.

SAAD

Apologies for invoking Your name.
Apologies for giving that man one
last ray of hope in this land that
stinks of winter and rot. Forgive
me.

A soldier under Saad's command approaches, revealing other
soidlers in the background patrolling the outskirts of the
village.

SOLDIER

Sir?

Saad seems a bit taken aback, thinking for a moment that he
was truly alone. He composes himself and answers the
soldier.

SAAD

Oh, apologies. Anything to report, soldier?

SOLDIER

Traced around the entire outskirts. No survivors, only corpses and ice. Must've been a bloodbath.

Saad crosses his arms.

SAAD

Yes, thank you, soldier. Let's hope the scouts inside the village have more luck finding survivors. For now, you and everyone else needs to stand at the ready and guard the village. Cieslani are tactical enough to come back and clean up, in case there are any survivors.

SOLDIER

Yes sir, we will be prepared if any Cieslani attempt to invade the village again. You have my word.

The soldier crosses his right arm over his chest as a salute. Saad follows suit.

SAAD

And you have my honor. Now go and inform the others of our next course of action.

The soldier runs off. Saad takes a look at the dead body of the man who he granted mercy to only moments ago. A solemn look overcomes his face. He decides to give this man the most proper burial he can manage. He picks him up by the part of his body that is still flesh and not ice, and walks off into the nearby woods.

EXT. DESECRATED FOREST - MOMENTS LATER

Saad carries the broken dead body of the man into the dead forest. Trees are devoid of leaves, standing naked in the everlasting winter. However, the ground is littered with long-dead leaves that refuse to rot and wither, a testament

to the death of the world in which everything refuses to rot.

As Saad walks among the sea of dead leaves, he stumbles upon something and nearly trips, before regaining his footing. Using his feet, he sweeps off some of the leaves over what he nearly tripped on and finds a body. Perfectly preserved and free of rot. He lays the corpse of the man he gave mercy to next to it, before investigating the area further. There, he finds dozens of corpses - a mass grave of unburied corpses as the weather has made the ground impossible to dig graves in. Entire generations of this village, laid to rest in this forest in what can't even be considered a shallow grave. Among the dead, he finds two corpses - a woman holding her dead daughter in her arms, together in death, with an empty space next to them reserved for someone. Saad turns back to the man's dead body, and carries him over. Placing him in the vacant spot, he recovers the bodies he found and offers a short, incomprehensible prayer to ensure their safe passing. These people could truly rest in peace now.

Suddenly, Saad's upper back flares up again. He drops to his knees as the pain is overwhelming this time, more so than the pain he felt earlier. He grits his teeth and starts breathing heavily, he is in visible agony that persists as rotting juices stain his clothes.

SAAD

Shit, no...they're...they're here...!

Saad gathers all the strength he can through the blinding and horrifying pain he feels, and runs off. The crunching of leaves under his boots echo throughout the forest, as he runs past a group of shadowed figures. Thankfully, the trees conceal his presence, ensuring he doesn't get noticed by them. The camera cuts to the figures, and two of them immediately stand out - a woman with dark skin and a braided bun, and another woman, with light skin and shaggy brunette hair that reaches her shoulders who towers over her. They are both adorned in similar armor as Saad, except their armor is more pristine and well-maintained, bearing a similar rose and thorn motif as Saad's sword. The short woman turns to the tall woman, stopping dead in her tracks as she hears the crunching of leaves just beyond the path they are walking.

SHORT WOMAN

Oi, you hear something moving out there?

The tall woman listens carefully. The crunching has stopped. She turns to the short woman.

TALL WOMAN

I hear nothing, sister. Cieslani are hardly known for their stealth. If it was a surprise attack they would have very much had the decency to let us know before they strike. Keep your wits about you and keep moving.

The tall woman turns to the rest of the holy warriors among them.

TALL WOMAN

That goes for all of you, too. If I catch any one of you not upholding your duties, in the name of Sretomir, I will exert discipline to bring you all into shape. Our orders are to secure the village of Zary from any Cieslani that still lurks there. Treat this with the highest of worries - Cieslani have not made this aggressive of an attack on human territory since the Battle of Yumi-Nu, I want you all to be prepared for the very worst that can happen! Am I clear, or am I not among holy warriors?

HOLY WARRIORS (IN UNISON)

Yes, Arbiter Ghyslaine!

Ghyslaine turns to the short woman, who did not speak in unison with the rest of the holy warriors. The short woman quickly composes herself and speaks.

SHORT WOMAN

Yes, sister-

GHYSLAINE

Not 'sister', Bakari. On the battlefield, I am your Arbiter. I expect the same amount of respect and discipline from you as I do from every other holy warrior. No exceptions.

Bakari visibly winces from the slight scolding from Ghyslaine. Then straightens herself out and responds in kind.

BAKARI

Yes, Arbiter Ghyslaine!

GHYSLAINE

Excellent. Carry forth, holy warriors.

The group of holy warriors continue moving on the path forward to the village. Standing at the ready for whatever waits for them.

CUT TO:

EXT. DESECRATED VILLAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Tzilla is investigating the destruction and remains of the village, stepping over body after body and making sure not to touch any ice.

TZILLA

It's been so long since Cieslani attacked human territory that I forgot how thorough they are in causing destruction.

Larissa follows behind, using her dexterity to carefully navigate the hazardous terrain of icy corpses and debris.

LARISSA

Alright, feeling better. Haven't seen this much death and destruction in ages. On the bright side, if Cieslani do strike, they're essentially entering *my* domain. Got enough decay in the air to make them pay.

Tzilla looks slightly irritated at Larissa's carefree nature regarding the grim scene.

TZILLA

Cieslani are behaving more aggressively than usual and are slowly encroaching on Rostkov territory and you think behaving like *this* is at all appropriate for the situation at hand?

Larissa shrugs as she leaps over the frozen corpse of an older woman to catch up.

LARISSA

People die every day. I can't cry for every soul who ends up perishing here, or else I'd have no tears for the moments that truly matter.

Larissa pauses as she hears the groaning of a half-dead Cieslani near her. She unsheathes a hollow knife and throws it with precision at it's head. The hollow ringing inside the knife instantly causes the Cieslani to shatter into pieces. She turns back to Tzilla without breaking so much as a sweat.

LARISSA

Besides, fuck Rostkov. They want your head on a plate. Why give two damns about what happens to them? The rest of the world is much more worth saving, who cares if some corrupt Noble Houses and apathetic holy warriors bite it?

Tzilla grits her teeth at Larissa's words. She might be right, she doesn't have a reason to love Rostkov, but saving people comes before personal prejudices.

TZILLA

I understand your disdain towards those who have wronged me and Saad...and you are right, I lack a reason to care about Rostkov. But don't assume for a minute that I would sooner see Rostkov be turned

into an icy wasteland before I see
all Cieslani and the apprentices
who hold their leashes eradicated
on the spot.

LARISSA

You missed the part where Rostkov
outlawed my people's magic and
threw us to the wolves to die?
Maybe the world doesn't need
Rostkov, maybe a better country in
it's place with the same amount of
manpower could actually do
something about the-

Tzilla sticks her hand up rashly, signalling Larissa to shut
up and stop talking.

TZILLA

We are *not* having a political
debate when the village of Zary
lays destroyed, and I find it
increasingly difficult to tolerate
your inability to see people
instead of ruling classes.

Tzilla calms herself after saying that. Larissa tilts her
head in confusion, waiting for Tzilla to say something to
her.

TZILLA

Tell me if your scouts have found
anything. I am in desperate need
of something positive, for once.

LARISSA

Nothing but corpses, I'm afraid.
Both of Cieslani, and of villagers
who either died fighting or
hiding. Safe to say that we aren't
finding survivors any time soon.

Just as Larissa says that, a sobbing woman can be heard
coming from one of the ruined houses. The two women take a
moment to listen, then stare at each other in realization -
a possible survivor. Tzilla rushes over to save the woman,
regardless if she is on her deathbed or not. Each saved life

is important in the grand scheme of a potential Cieslani invasion.

Tzilla kicks down the door to the ruined house, it is destroyed beyond repair to the point where it's more like a pile of frosted wood instead of an actual house. There, she finds a young woman trapped amidst the pile of broken wood and debris. She is injured, but lacks any of the telltale frozen body parts that indicate someone's inevitable death by Cieslani attack. Tzilla smiles in relief at finding a survivor.

TZILLA

Larissa! I found one.

Tzilla immediately gets to work at removing the rubble on top of the woman, using her raw strength to pick up and throw the debris to the side in order to save her. Larissa comes running in and lends a hand, although she visibly struggles with pulling some of the debris off. Eventually, all the debris is removed and the woman stands up, albeit limping from injuries sustained in the attack. Otherwise, she is alive and capable of getting out of here with proper assistance. Tzilla helps steady the woman, carrying her by the shoulder and showing relief that she managed to save her life.

TZILLA

You're going to be fine, you have my word.

The young woman, still in a visible state of distress, nods her head at Tzilla to affirm that she believes her words, that she believes she will be saved. She does, however, not say anything beyond a few fear-filled grunts and weeps as she turns her head to the left. The dead bodies of her parents lay beneath the rubble, broken, frozen, and crushed under the weight.

Larissa runs in shortly after. Tzilla turns her attention to her, looking visibly annoyed and disappointed.

TZILLA

And would you care to tell me how your scouts were deaf to this woman's crying? She would've been left to die, had we not been so

fortunate enough to hear her
cries.

LARISSA

My scouts traced every inch of
this village from front to back,
maybe instead of taking out your
disdain on me, you leave me to
scold my scouts instead? They are
my responsibility, not yours.

The injured woman breaks down and begins sobbing loudly.
Tzilla will let her cry into her shoulder.

TZILLA

Easy now, easy...the nightmare is
over, I'm going to get you to
safety, get you patched up, you
can travel with us for a while. I
promise you, we will find you a
new save haven.

Larissa stands in and lends a hand in supporting the injured
woman, helping her steady herself over pieces of sharp and
dangerous debris.

LARISSA

Right, what the one-eyed woman
said. This village is a bit too
dangerous right now - stick
closely to us, we are *much* nicer.

The three women maneuver out of the wreckage, and begin the
trek out of the ruined village. They are walking slowly, as
the injured woman's injuries prevent her from moving at a
faster pace. She begins sobbing even more as she notices her
hometown in ruins, filled with corpses, ice, and an
overwhelming stink of decay.

YOUNG WOMAN

The pain...the horror...

Tzilla will attempt to calm the woman down, shushing her -
also partially because she doesn't want her crying to
attract the attention of any Cieslani, should they be around
the ruins.

TZILLA

Easy, easy. What's your name?

In-between sobbing, the woman answers.

YOUNG WOMAN

H-Hanna...my name is Hanna,
daughter of the local baker,
daughter of-

She pauses and then begins crying some more, from the trauma of witnessing her destroyed hometown, and the severity of her injuries affecting her. She drops to the ground as a flash of pain hits her, she howls out in agony as Tzilla and Larissa lower themselves to her level when she collapses.

TZILLA

Damnit.

Tzilla will put her hand over Hanna's mouth.

TZILLA

Quiet. You'll attract their
attention. We need to get you out
of her as silent as possible.
Understood?

Hanna thrashes and panics as she doesn't take well to Tzilla putting her hand over her mouth. Tzilla ends up having to restrain her. Larissa backs off as Tzilla is strong enough to restrain the woman by herself.

LARISSA

Pardon my Rostkovan, but what the
fuck are you doing? This woman
just went through one of the most
traumatic days of her life, and
here you are trouncing in and
acting almost as bad as the things
that did this-

Tzilla shoots her a glare.

TZILLA

Quiet. We still haven't heard a
report from Saad or his men. Those
things could still be crawling out
there...we can't risk her drawing
their attention with her cries.
Call me a villain all you want,
Larissa, but you aren't the one
making the hard choices here.

LARISSA

Hmph, fine. Just drop the "protector" act if this is how you keep treating survivors. I'll just be silent on the matter.

The two women carefully lift Hanna up. Tzilla is less harsh on Hanna, instead seeming to take Larissa's words slightly to heart and taking a more gentle approach to her screaming.

TZILLA

We won't move until you stop making noise. Worst day of your life, yes, but it doesn't need to be the last day of your life either. Now stick close to us.

Hanna nods, a dull expression on her face. She is exhausted from all the horrors she faced today, and just wants an out as soon as possible.

LARISSA

Wasn't so hard now, Tzilla. Wasn't it? Having *compassion*?

Tzilla ignores Larissa's barbed tongue and the three women begin their slow journey. Until Saad comes rushing in, panting and looking drained from his painful experience earlier with the holy warriors encounter. Behind him are two of his men, the rest of them are not present.

SAAD

Holy warriors are on their way, I could not mistake the horrifying stench and agonizing torment I felt for anything else, we need to end this investigation early.

LARISSA

Wait, what? Who alerted those plant-kissing bastards of the attack? Shouldn't they be celebrating or something?

TZILLA

Wasn't me, either we have an outsider's eye watching us, or

perhaps there's someone inside our
forces who-

Hanna glances between the two women, and takes this as a chance to break free from their grasp as she refuses to trust either of them. She tries to break into a sprint and ignore the pain, but she damages her bad leg further and ends up collapsing - directly on top of a frozen corpse. She screams in agony as the corpse shoots out icy spikes that impale her like a cactus, keeping her in place as she bleeds everywhere, her blood becoming frozen on the spikes. Larissa sticks her hand out in horror, a futile attempt at saving Hanna.

LARISSA

NO-!

Saad gasps, Tzilla looks at the two and shakes her head, and steps in front of Larissa before she can do anything rash.

TZILLA

Don't, she sentenced herself to
death. Concern yourself with your
own safety, we can't save her now.

Larissa peeks past Tzilla to see Hanna squirming, she is likely not going to survive even if she was pulled up.

TZILLA

Larissa!

LARISSA

Alright, alright! We need to get
moving, I'll go tell my scouts to
withdraw.

Larissa runs off, exchanging one more glance at the mangled Hanna. The men Saad came in with follow Larissa, leaving Tzilla and Saad behind.

Tzilla turns her head to Saad.

TZILLA

And how about you? Are you going
to be okay? I'm well aware of your
brand and how it would-

SAAD

It is my own burden to bear,
 Tzilla. Do not concern yourself
 with how it affects me. I will
 concern myself with getting a safe
 distance away from the holy
 warriors, my men have already
 withdrawn and are awaiting their
 next orders with bated breath.

Tzilla cracks a small smile, as a way to ease tension
 between both her and Saad.

TZILLA

Alright, as long as you say you're
 okay, I have full faith that you
 are.

Suddenly, armored footsteps are heard in the distance. It's
 the holy warriors, they have arrived. Bakari and Ghyslaine
 lead from the front. Bakari strides confidently, keeping her
 head up high. Ghyslaine leads in a dignified strut that
 inspires both awe and fear.

Tzilla, without thinking twice, grabs Saad by the shoulders
 and drags him along behind some rubble that conceals their
 position. Hanna is still crying and sobbing as she lays
 bleeding on top the icy corpse, the spikes penetrating into
 the front and through the back, impaling her in place.

GHYSLAINE

Thorns, what a mess. A waste of
 Sretomir's seeds. At least our
 messenger wasn't lying about what
 had happened here.

BAKARI

Our messenger said that the Hallow
 Executioners would be present,
 should we conduct a search for
 any-

Ghyslaine pierces Bakari with a sharp glare.

GHYSLAINE

The "Hallow Executioners" are a
 fairy tale made up by
 Wintertouched peasants to explain
 why Cieslani are too passive to

strike their villages. This? This den of death and frost? This is real. Believe in reality over tales of the inferior, Bakari.

Bakari gulps, her confidence seeming to have been further shook up by Ghyslaine's dismissive reading of her.

BAKARI

Yes...I should not have put any stock in such tales.

Ghyslaine raises a brow, expecting her title to be used.

BAKARI

...Arbiter Ghyslaine.

Behind the rubble, Tzilla tries to whisper to Saad about this new information.

TZILLA

How do they know-

Saad promptly shushes Tzilla as he listens in. Ghyslaine then turns her attention to the injured and bleeding Hanna.

GHYSLAINE

Ah, Cieslani handiwork. Turn corpses into dangerous traps. I both admire and despise the lowhanded craftiness of those fog-smitten beasts.

Hanna is now quietly sobbing, having grown weaker from blood loss as the spikes continue to grow through her. Her eyes weakly gaze up to Ghyslaine.

BAKARI

We're here for survivors, we're here to rescue anyone we can find-

Ghyslaine unsheathes her sword and in one swift, brutal motion, she puts an end to Hanna's suffering. Frozen blood and ice spikes fly into the air after the execution. Pulling a small cloth from her pouch, Ghyslaine then nonchalantly cleans the blood off her sword. Bakari looks at her, stunned. The holy warriors behind her look blankly.

GHYSLAINE

There, I helped. Do you think the life of a holy warrior is a heroic tale of chivalry, Bakari? That we help the helpless, no matter how far gone we are? I granted that girl mercy. Would you rather have her bleed out in agony because your bleeding heart couldn't resist being the hero? Or would you rather send her to Sretomir's Garden immediately? You may answer incorrectly now, but I assure you, one day, you'll see what I see and share my outlook.

Bakari is visibly shaking at receiving yet another dressing down from Ghyslaine, but nods her head in agreement.

BAKARI

Of course. I should have known better. I await your orders, Arbiter Ghyslaine, as we all do.

Ghyslaine gives one quick glance to Hanna's dead body. A reminder of what Cieslani are capable of, and a reminder of what she's fighting for.

GHYSLAINE

Search this entire village, and I mean every single inch of it that you can see. A thorough search means more results, and I expect nothing less than perfection in this investigation.

Tzilla and Saad are still in hiding, the two share a glance at each other, realizing that something is amiss and there are questions the two of them have that need answers immediately.

GHYSLAINE

Lord Johanas Biernet has already been informed of the attack on Biernet territory. He will likely expect someone else to solve his own problems, and we are the someone else that he is relying on. A Cieslani raid of this

severity means these creatures are getting bolder and more aggressive in their tactics against us.

Bakari and the other holy warriors stand in attendance to Ghyslaine's speech, hands crossed at their waist in respect, and fear.

GHYSLAINE

For too long, we have shown that we are just as willing to let ourselves become gorged on order politics and intrigue to focus on our duties as the rightful protectors of Rostkov, and the thorns of Sretomir's Wrath. We have proven ourselves to be just as bad as the inactive and rumor-addled nobility of Rostkov. This is our chance to prove to the heretics that our creeds are as sharp as our blades, and that we won't hesitate to take action when our homes are being threatened.

In hiding, Tzilla whispers to Saad

TZILLA

All this for a simple investigation-

SAAD

Must you speak?

Ghyslaine finishes her winded speech and gives her final words of encouragement to Bakari, and the entourage of holy warriors.

GHYSLAINE

Now, holy warriors. We clean this mess up, and everything we find will be used as a weapon against the wretched winter beasts should they dare approach our lands once more. Onwards!

HOLY WARRIORS

For Sretomir!

Bakari looks as if she is out of place, as if she doesn't belong. But she still acts the part of a zealous, righteous holy warrior.

BAKARI

Yes, for Sretomir!

The holy warriors dispatch and begin investigating around the ruined town. Tzilla will speak freely now that there is no speech to listen to.

TZILLA

So, a traitor hides among us?
Bringing these holy warriors down
on us would have gotten you
executed, and the rest of us
executed for harboring a deserter.

SAAD

Which is why you can trust that I
haven't called them in. I would be
sentencing myself to death for
even setting foot inside Rostkov.

TZILLA

I trust you enough to know that
you did not have a hand in this
intrusion, Saad. You have my word
on that.

Saad smiles slightly, honored to have his loyalty to Tzilla reaffirmed by her.

SAAD

The problem we face now is...how
do we escape, what was the plan
here? I am certain that you had a
plan here.

TZILLA

Was curious about how those holy
warriors would react to the
wreckage and what their course of
action would be, just so we can
avoid straying into their path.
Consider it...intel collecting.

SAAD

A very clever and subtle way of saying you have no plan on how to get us out of here.

Tzilla will peek her head out from the rubble, finding out that the holy warriors are too distracted in their own investigations to take note of anything else.

TZILLA

Well, just found our only window for escape. Keep your head down and...try, to be as stealthy as you can in that armor of yours. Speaking of which, your mark hasn't flared up yet-

SAAD

Too much rot and decay lingers in this air, Sretomir cannot reach me without being repulsed by the sheer death that lays here. Once we get out of here, however, that is when the pain will return tenfold. A sensation that I am...not excited to experience again, to say it in simplistic terminology.

TZILLA

Excellent. We will discuss the possibility of a traitor among our ranks once we have gotten ourselves in a safe place. Follow my lead, this isn't my first time I relied on the shadows to save my life.

Saad nods, the two move out of cover and begin moving and weaving between rubble and destroyed houses alike, keeping their cover and not being noticed by any holy warriors investigating the village. Tzilla is naturally good at keeping cover, while Saad tries to imitate Tzilla's swift movements without his armor making too much noise. Something he struggles with, yet his footsteps are too light and he is too far from the holy warriors for them to hear his movements. Eventually, the two manage to leave in the direction that Larissa left the village in, finally breathing in relief once they've escaped.

CUT TO:

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF DESECRATED VILLAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Larissa runs up to greet her two allies, looking relieved but also irritated that they didn't leave with her immediately.

LARISSA

Hope almost losing your heads was worth it, you two.

TZILLA

We're fine, that's all that matters.

SAAD

I must ask, Tzilla, you seemed to recognize one of those warriors - do you have an idea of who they are?

TZILLA

Unimportant. We make way to camp now, we have something of utmost importance to discuss.

The three agree and make their way back to the Hollow Executioners' camp.

CUT TO:

INT. BIERNET HIDDEN DUNGEONS - NIGHT

Stanislaw stands before the scarred man - an older man with a grizzled demeanor, now tied up with rope and slowly waking up. The two men are in one of the dungeon's cells, with three agents standing behind Stanislaw, all four of them with crossed arms. The agents both have their faces concealed with cloth masks, that have the insignia of a bat's teeth sloppily painted on them with white paint. There is an uncomfortable silence lingering in the room as neither man makes an immediate move to start talking.

SCARRED MAN

I ain't interested in talking, sycophant. Either way, you kill

me, or my boss cuts off an ear for my failure and uses it as "material". Not that you know what I bloody mean by that.

Stanislaw tilts his head and closes his eyes. He lowers his arms and paces slowly back and forth throughout the room. The agents behind him stay perfectly still, as if they are mere statues.

STANISLAW

Was not expecting you to speak, oh dearest friend. I know your kind - the kind that things not talking will somehow save their lives. All it does is draw out their deaths for a little longer. Quite pitiable, truly. I almost feel sorry for your fate.

The scarred man starts struggling against his bindings, grunting and groaning. An agent suddenly gets jumpy and reaches for a dagger around their waist. One of their fellow agents stick their hand out in a motion to stop them from stabbing the scarred man out of instinct.

AGENT

No. Tombmaster wants this one alive. If you even think about doing that again, I'll end your life here and now.

The Scarred Man's expression goes from agape with shock, to a wide-mouthed open smile followed by some hearty, sickly chuckling.

SCARRED MAN

Tombmaster? Ain't no fuckin' way you're a Barbastelle, you fuckin' assassins aren't as open as this, and ain't no fuckin' way you're a goddamn *guild master* in these parts. You're just a bloody servant who knows how to get his hands dirty.

Stopping his pacing, Stanislaw stands in front of the Scarred Man and begins unbuttoning his formal shirt just

enough to expose his chest. There, the Scarred Man is proven wrong about his doubts regarding Stanislaw - Stanislaw's muscular and in-shape body is also differentiated from others due to the presence of spiky, wing-like tattoo markings underneath his pectoral muscles. In the center of his chest, ritualistic scarring can be seen, connected to the wings. All in all, these two different markings come together to create an abstract symbol of a bat on his chest.

STANISLAW

Truth is stranger than fairy tales
 ever could be, my dear friend.
 Best not to doubt someone when
 they tell you something that
 sounds rather absurd. Agreed?

The Scarred Man is once again agape with shock. In a moment of frustration, he tries to lunge at Stanislaw while still trapped in his bindings, making the chair move a little as he does.

STANISLAW

You can keep trying to do that,
 sir. I have made sure your
 bindings were just tight enough to
 be inescapable, but not so tight
 that the rope burn becomes
 unbearable. I may be a Tombmaster,
 but I am a man of considerable
 mercy, after all. Besides, you're
 lucky to have me as an
 interrogator - other Tombmasters
 would have far better use of you
 as a corpse - or something far
 worse.

The Scarred Man is speechless, giving wordless nods as he lets Stanislaw continue talking, realizing he's talking to an actual Tombmaster and what that entails.

STANISLAW

You will tell me everything, and
 if you don't or I find out you
 told a fib, I can get word out to
 the other Barbastelles operating
 in Rostkov and beyond that you
 have been marked for the Tomb. You
 will be free to walk, but you will

never walk without the cover of darkness again. And even then, you will never be safe - even the footsteps you make in the shadows will be your undoing, old friend.

He then grabs hold of one of the Scarred Man's fingers. He begins panicking, immediately assuming it's about to get snapped violently.

STANISLAW

Alright, question time. Give a clear answer or else you'll discover that even my mercy has limitations if it gets in the way of results. Understood?

The Scarred Man nods, uneasy but ready for the interrogation to start.

STANISLAW

You haven't been very honest with me, friend. Let's start by giving me your name.

A moment of silence passes. Shrugging, Stanislaw begins to bend the man's finger. He begins shouting before blurting out his actual name to spare his finger.

SCARRED MAN

Oh, fuck you! It's Szymon! Szymon!
STOP!

Stanislaw then stops pulling the finger and gently lays it down, giving a reassuring, yet threatening smile to Szymon after finally getting a name to put with a face. After a few moments, he goes back to slowly bending the finger.

STANISLAW

Excellent job, Szymon. We are far from over, I fear.

Stanislaw turns his attention to one of the agents, his stare firm and authoritative.

STANISLAW

You there. Bring me the blade, and do not be sluggish about it.

The agent nods, and runs off.

SZYMON

Blade...?

STANISLAW

I would appreciate it if you didn't act so coy about this blade, Szymon. You may remember as the bloodletting blade that you were intending on taking my liege's life with.

Szymon stays silent, choosing to turn his head away from Stanislaw.

STANISLAW

Suit yourself. I'll spare your finger the turmoil until the blade is in the room. I don't just snap finger bones into twos for the fun of it anyway.

The agent runs back in with the blade in hand, the same bloodletting blade that was retrieved from the assassination attempt earlier.

AGENT

Sir.

STANISLAW

Ah. Thank you.

Stanislaw retrieves the blade from the agent, examining it slightly.

STANISLAW

Return to the others. I've got this.

The agent complies.

STANISLAW

Now then, Szymon...this blade is oddly peculiar to me. Something to do with the eye motif on it. A man's gotta wonder where a blade like this one came from.

Szymon does not say a word, instead silently glaring at Stanislaw, who is still rambling and doesn't bother to acknowledge Szymon's disdain for him.

STANISLAW

Now then...

He uses his free hand to put Szymon's finger in a tight grasp.

STANISLAW

Who's your boss? Assassins are a dime a dozen and easy to replace, but you...you have much more to you than meets the eye.

SZYMON

Fuck. You.

Stanislaw, without thinking twice, bends Szymon's finger immediately. The cracking of bone is heard alongside Szymon's agonized screaming, followed by a sickening SNAP!

STANISLAW

Oh dear, my hand slipped. Best not be so uncooperative next time, yes?

Szymon is panting and breathing rapidly as the shock of pain rushes through his body. He begins sweating and stares at his broken, bleeding finger with horrified eyes. Soon, Stanislaw's free hand is wrapped around another finger of his.

STANISLAW

We can try this again, this time with less broken bones. Who are you working for?

Szymon is still in shock over his broken finger, he turns to Stanislaw, his eyes practically bulging out of his head in pure anger.

SZYMON

YOU BROKE MY FUCKING FINGER YOU
FUCKING CUNT!

Stanislaw once again, snaps the other finger. This time there is less resistance, just a swift SNAP and more screaming.

STANISLAW

I am beginning to get very frustrated with your lack of manners. If I run out of fingers I'll move on to toes, then joints, and finally, I'll just snap your neck for good measure. Are we clear on that?

Szymon is an incomprehensible screaming mess at this point. Even some of the agents are shifting around uncomfortably, showing their distaste towards Stanislaw's interrogation methods. Stanislaw turns his head to the discomfited agents, and raises a gray brow at their uncertainty.

STANISLAW

I didn't realize the criteria for becoming a Barbarstelle had become so...lessened, over the years. If you lot cannot handle a little bit of dirty work, what makes you think yourselves worthy of your station?

The one agent, the one who scolded the other agent for showing discomfort earlier, steps forward. They clear their throat and fiddle around with their wrists, adjusting the cuffs of their sleeves.

AGENT

...want me to punish them for showing weakness, Tombmaster?

Stanislaw thinks.

STANISLAW

Hmmmm...what a bold suggestion, dear agent.

The other agents look on edge, nervous. Some even look ready to kill the agent for even daring to say such a thing. Stanislaw looks over the rest of the agents, disappointed at their apprehension and eagerness to only act when threatened.

STANISLAW

You lot are so disappointing...a
shame only one of you has a
backbone.

Stanislaw nods to the agent,

STANISLAW

Impress me.

The agent nods, turning to their siblings-in-arms, a glint of blood lust seen in their eyes. As the other agents back up in fear, not even attempting to put up a fight. The humming of bat chirps can be heard subtly as we see the agent's wrists again, this time sprouting several razor sharp teeth. Eventually, one of the agents decides to either live or die fighting and rushes at the agent, screaming.

RUSHING AGENT

FOR THE BARB-

The rushing agent's words are cut off as a sharpened tooth strikes directly at their jugular vein. They collapse on the ground in a bloodied heap, grabbing their throat, squirming and choking on their own blood. They pass away in a puddle of their own blood.

The other two agents look frightened, horrified. One of them even begins begging.

BEGGING AGENT

Oh, no no! No no no! Not like
this, Tombmaster, NOT LIKE THIS!
PLEASE!

STANISLAW

You initiates have gotten too
soft. If I can't trust you to have
a backbone to do your job and
protect your liege, I have no
reason to keep you lot alive.
We'll pick up other stragglers who
aren't as turned off from the
sight of blood as you are.

BEGGING AGENT

BUT I WANNA GO HOME-

A flurry of sharpened teeth hit the agent in the face, impaling them in the throat, cheek, eyes, and forehead. They collapse to the ground in a slump and begin screaming. Their screams are silenced when the agent steps on their throat, crushing it and killing them.

The final agent attempts to rush to the cell door, trying to hastily unlock it. As their hands fumble with the door, a dagger appears to swiftly cut off both of their hands. As their hands drop to the floor in a thud, they stare at their bleeding stubs in shock and horror, lifting them to their face. As they are too taken aback by shock to even scream, they don't notice the dagger's blade coming back, this time for the throat. They die, attempting to clutch their slashed throat with hands that no longer are a part of them, dropping to their knees and falling backwards onto the cold floor.

Stanislaw is equal parts morbidly impressed, and formally complimentary at the agent's swift and lethal kills. The agent wipes the blood off of their dagger using the mask of one of their slain siblings-in-arms.

STANISLAW

An impressive display, agent. I was beginning to lose hope in the future of our organization. How pleasurable it is that individuals, equal parts talented and ruthless, like you exist to prove my viewpoint rather baseless.

AGENT

Is that all, sir? May I return to overlooking this interrogation as you asked?

STANISLAW

Hmph. This will be over in a minute-

SZYMON

The fuck you mean-

Stanislaw sticks a finger up to shut Szymon up.

STANISLAW

Speak only when I am asking questions, before I decide your tongue should go next.

AGENT

Sir...you were saying?

STANISLAW

Apologies for the rude company, agent. But get back to your quarters. We will speak when I have time.

The agent bows respectfully.

AGENT

Yes sir.

The agent fishes the keys to the cell out of Stanislaw's pant pocket, heading over to unlock the cell door and leave.

STANISLAW

Oh, and before you scatter along now, agent.

The agent pauses, letting out a slight sigh as they do so.

STANISLAW

You no longer respond to the term "Agent", now. You are known as Carnifex, and I expect your full attention when I use that name for you. Are we crystal clear on the matter?

Agent - no, Carnifex - nods to themselves while standing in place.

CARNIFEX

Yes, sir. From now on, I am to be known as Carnifex. Nothing else.

STANISLAW

Excellent. Do try not to stray too far from your nest now. I have plans for you. Now leave and await my commands.

Carnifex gives another wordless nod as they leave the cell, their head held up high but keeping a subtle and passive demeanor despite the bloodshed they had caused in the cell minutes before. Szymon looks on as she leaves, his face contorted in discomfort and fear as he awaits for his final fate.

SZYMON

Oh, fuck me...

As Szymon mutters incoherently, still slightly numb from his broken fingers, Stanislaw takes a look at the blade, and runs his hand over it. Slight tingles of frost shoot at his fingertips, as if the blade is alive...and dislikes being touched by someone who isn't its owner. In a moment of curiosity, he wanders over to one of the corpses of the slain agents, and raises the blade over it.

STANISLAW

Right, the moment of truth.

SZYMON

What the fuck do you think you're doing, mate? Didn't know you liked defiling corpses-

Before Szymon can finish his sentence, Stanislaw plunges the blade directly into the heart of the dead agent. Instantly, frost begins forming at the site where the blade impaled them. Their corpse suddenly jolts up slightly, as if being brought to life, and their eyes open - pale and wintry. A ghostly wail of agony echoes throughout the small cell, sounding like a wheezing cough mixed with a ghostly chorus. As Stanislaw plunges the blade deeper inside, icicles begin growing out of the stab wound, puncturing the skin they grow out of, and the screams become choked as the corpse's mask begins to deform and twist - icicles are growing out of the mouth too.

STANISLAW

There. No more interrogation. Carnifex saved me from snapping another one of your fingers, good sir.

Stanislaw violently pulls the blade out of the corpse, and it slinks back to the ground, once again silent, yet with

icicles still growing out of the remains. Szymon looks on, mortified - his cover is blown.

SZYMON

Oh, fuck me...

Stanislaw walks back to Szymon, looking down at him as he struggles and fights against the ropes that bind him.

STANISLAW

A henchman to one of the apprentices. Color me not surprised.

SZYMON

Our invasion is just beginning, you old fuck. I'm merely one of many trying to etch out a better life in this fucking shithole continent-

Stanislaw laughs heartily, not giving Szymon the privilege of finishing his sentence.

STANISLAW

And you think they aren't going to dispose of you once they've turned every inch of land and sea into an everlasting snowstorm? My, if I let you go they'll already kill you for proving their point about humans like you, dear sir.

Stanislaw leans down, his voice turning into a menacing, angered tone, dripping with disdain towards Szymon's cutthroat personality.

STANISLAW

That your beating heart is why you fail. Your disposable mortality makes you better suited as a pawn, than someone who deserves to eat at the feast.

Szymon, realizing he's out of options and will very likely die no matter what, spitefully spits in Stanislaw's face. It is a nasty one, too, saliva covering his face and dripping into his beard. Stanislaw is unphased and simply glares back.

SZYMON

Go on then, cunt. *Break another goddamn finger.* I got nothing else to give - the invasion is starting soon enough. Soon you'll be nothing more than materials for the masters to craft and reshape into something far, far better...

Stanislaw casually wipes the spit off his face with the back of his sleeve.

STANISLAW

Hm, had I realized who tugs your collar with a the pull of a leash earlier, I'd have killed you with no hesitation. Not because I hate you and the masters you lap up to, no, I merely think you're too pathetic and despicable to warrant my genuine, unbridled fury...but it's because you're far more useful to me dead, than you would ever be alive.

Stanislaw tosses the knife aside, pulling out a small, more subtle-looking dagger instead.

STANISLAW

The real knife of a killer, dear sir. We don't do any of that theatrical, morbid shite that your masters seem to be fond of.

SZYMON

Wait...more useful to you dead than alive, the fuck does that mean?

STANISLAW

Oh, dearest Szymon, they really do keep you in the dark, don't you? Frostguardians prefer to keep their secrets in the bones of their loyal servants. You take their secrets to the grave quite literally, old friend, but I won't be putting you to rest so quickly.

Stanislaw gently presses the tip of the tagger on Szymon's neck.

STANISLAW

Don't worry, I'm a man of mercy.
You die *before* the skinning
happens. I may be known to be
cruel, judging by your ruined
fingers, but since I already know
what the next step is, you being
alive isn't needed.

In a panicked struggle, Szymon jerks around and manages to knock the knife out of Stanislaw's hands with his struggling, sustaining a cut on his cheek as he does so.

SZYMON

FUCK YOU, I may have never gotten
to ascend, but my masters will
come knocking at your door! You
will wander as Cieslani attack dog
for the rest of your miserable
existence, then they will find
NOTHING useful about you and
dispose of you! That's when your
soul will wander in purgatory for
an eternity, Tombmaster! AN
ETERNITY!

Stanislaw laughs as he retrieves the knife, this time grabbing Szymon's head from behind to keep him steady for what comes next, placing the blade against the front of his throat.

STANISLAW

Oh, don't worry about that, I'm
not going anywhere - I'm death
incarnate after all. Enjoy leaving
more of a mark on Rostkov's
history as a skeletal cadaver
instead of it's demise.

With a swift motion of the wrist, Stanislaw slits Szymon's throat. Szymon's panicked and struggled grunts turn into gagging on his own blood, him weakly and pathetically begging for air as he gags and twitches. After a few moments, save for some twitching, Szymon lays motionless,

blood pouring from his throat and mouth as he does a pathetic death.

Stanislaw pulls out a fancy cloth and cleans his dagger of blood, of which there is very minimal of. He made an expertly swift incision.

STANISLAW
Bloody hell, indeed...

CUT TO:

INT. BIERNET QUARTERS - NIGHT

Johanas lies asleep in his bed, his bedroom decorated rather lavishly and with bold, warm colors. The decor, however, shows signs of age, neglect, and decay, looking as if eaten by moths and collecting dust for decades. As Johanas rapidly blinks, he weakly turns his head around to take in his surroundings, clearly still feeling the effects of his excessive drinking at the party.

SI-U
Ah, you're awake. Thank the Gardens.

Johanas is startled by Si-U's unexpected presence, almost scooting back in bed in surprise.

JOHANAS
Si-U...what the fuck?

SI-U
You were blackout drunk, we thought it was best to cancel the feast early and let everyone go home. It's better you get some rest, rather than being seen in such an unbecoming state...

Johanas, in a panic, reaches under his pillow and pulls out an ornate knife. He points it at Si-U with an unhinged look on his face.

JOHANAS
Stay! Stay the fuck back!

Si-U lifts his arms up to show he comes in peace, that this isn't part of a plan or an elaborately cruel prank.

SI-U

Relax, I am not here to stoke your paranoia. Merely came to check in on you.

JOHANAS

I don't need a "caretaker", Si-U, I have a retinue of servants...

SI-U

And yet as soon as I was ten steps out the door, one of them flagged me down and told me to check in on you. She led me here while you were asleep, and I waited.

Johanas raises a brow, clearly confused by the whole situation, and also too drunk to be fully aware in general.

SI-U

She must know of our bond as mentor and apprentice. It would've been Stanislaw, but I was told his hands were tied with other matters.

Si-U grabs a tray and brings it to Johanas. It is a simple bowl of soup with brown broth and shoddily molded croutons, alongside a glass of water and some rather wrinkly grapes.

SI-U

Here. The servant who brought me here prepared this. Said it was good to get something in you, especially since alcohol on an empty stomach does a lot of bad things to you.

Johanas picks the tray up and tosses it aside, the soup and water spilling everywhere, alongside the bowl and glass shattering as it hits the ground.

JOHANAS

I don't fucking need it.

Si-U stands in shock, hastily grabbing a nearby cloth and wiping up the mess.

JOHANAS

Did you miss the part where I said I have servants? An aspiring underdog can't be seen on his hands and knees cleaning up someone else's messes.

SI-U

You're right, politics are all about cleaning other people's messes up behind the scenes.

He sweeps up the broken ceramic and glass with a nearby broom.

SI-U

And you say that, like this kind of work is degrading for someone of my station. The opposite actually.

JOHANAS

It is. You should be passing law reforms and rallying our soldiers against the cold, not...cleaning up the messes of some drunkard.

SI-U

I'd rather be seen getting my rather eclectic clothes dirty among commoners than badmouthing them with rich assholes who probably want me dead. Besides, the common folk love a politician in tune with their struggles.

Johanas rolls his eyes, throwing his head back on his pillow and not amused by Si-U's bleeding heart.

SI-U

I can see why you don't relate, I'd ask you to try experiencing a day in the shoes of your servants but they're all rather...secretive. Can't tell

what a life under you would be
like-

Johanas jerks his head back up and shoots a glare at Si-U while he rambles.

JOHANAS

What happened?

Si-U stumbles over his own words. He clearly wants to tell Johanas about the incident that occurred at the party, but also shows concern.

SI-U

Were you...were you too drunk to remember? I mean, I remember it and I wasn't even the one who stopped it-

JOHANAS

Quit doing that thing where you shit yourself verbally and tell me what went down.

Si-U scratches the back of his head awkwardly, letting out an uncomfortable laugh.

SI-U

Well, there's no other way to say it but... you were a hair's inch away from being skewered by an assassin's blade. Had Stanislaw not intervened, well...you'd be dead. We would be without you, Johanas, Rostkov would be without you, it's why you should be more careful and-

Johanas stares blankly at Si-U, his face not betraying any emotions.

SI-U

I'm doing that thing where I ramble off again, aren't I? I'm sorry, this is a lot to take in, it's just that you were nearly taken advantage of in your current state and paid a price for it.

JOHANAS

So are you insisting that it's my fault that I nearly died in a damned assassination attempt? That I'm just a drunken asshole who's gonna get skewered again if they catch me stumbling again?

Si-U grimaces at the thought of implying such a thing.

SI-U

Oh! Not at all, Johanas, I'm sorry for implying such a thing! It's just that I am very worried about you and wouldn't want such a thing to happen again, but I won't talk you out of your current...er, lifestyle, because now is not the time or place-

A knock on the door is heard, breaking the awkward banter between the two men.

STANISLAW

Milord? May I make myself present in your quarters?

Si-U and Johanas share quick glances, before turning to the bedroom door.

JOHANAS

Enter.

The doorknob turns, and enters Stanislaw, visibly a bit haggard from the earlier interrogation. He wipes some sweat off his forehead with a fine cloth.

STANISLAW

Greetings milord...and Si-U.

SI-U

Oh, hi there, Stanislaw! I was just checking in on Johanas, like one of your little birdies told me to do!

Stanislaw eyes Si-U, nodding.

STANISLAW

That you did, but I am afraid you have served your purpose. Milord and I have private matters to discuss. I suggest you make yourself scarce. Dangerously late at night for a man of such importance as yourself to be out alone...

SI-U

Of course, I shall make myself scarce and get a night's worth of rest for tomorrow. Thank you, Stanislaw!

Si-U hurriedly leaves the bedroom, leaving the Lord and his loyal head servant behind. Stanislaw locks the door behind him.

STANISLAW

Lots of passion and care, that one? Wish I had his dedication to others when I was his age.

JOHANAS

I admire his optimism, but does he need to suckle at me like he's a pup and I his mother? Especially when I can hardly stand right now...

STANISLAW

Good observation. I don't want to talk about that man, however.

Stanislaw pulls up a chair and sits next to Johanas' bedside. He looks somber, concerned.

JOHANAS

You...dealt with the would-be assassin, didn't you?

Stanislaw nods.

STANISLAW

Dead as the winter, milord. However, he will prove more useful to us in death than in life.

Sometimes, a dead man's bones can
tell us all that we need to know.

Stanislaw pulls out the assassin's blade that he kept on
him, and lays it on the nightstand next to Johanas. Johanas
blinks rapidly as he stares at the blade.

JOHANAS

What is this, Stanislaw?

STANISLAW

A sign that we are in deep. Too
deep, I should say. You were not
attacked by a run-of-the-mill
assassin, milord, but something
that signals the beginning of the
end. *Our* end.

Johanas looks concerned, his normally dull face showing a
bit of fear.

STANISLAW

Shit, I should have waited until
you were sober enough to take this
all in. A rarity, I am ashamed to
say.

JOHANAS

No no, go on, tell me an abridged
version of what happened tonight.
I assure you, I can...handle it.

Stanislaw sighs, then pulls the chair closer.

STANISLAW

Alright, but listen up. I will not
repeat myself again.

CUT TO:

EXT. DESECRATED VILLAGE - NIGHT

The village of Zary, still destroyed, sits silent as holy
warriors examine the wreckage and corpses.

STANISLAW (V.O.)

The village of Zary - your Zary,
was razed to the ground. Nothing
but ice and corpses in the wake.

Bakari is seen praying over some mangled, broken, and frozen bodies. Ghyslaine passes by her and looks upon her, with disapproval and disdain. Bakari does not notice, and Ghyslaine moves on without thinking much of her.

STANISLAW

Cieslani. Has to be. They are never this aggressive unless they plan on escalating to an invasion, and Zary is just to set an example for everyone else.

CUT TO:

INT. LUCIAN'S QUARTERS - NIGHT

Lucian is seen scribbling away with a quill pen, unable to think of the right words.

STANISLAW

Not even the Queen is aware of what has happened. Someone will inform her, but this news would be devastating to us - the threat of invasion, after barely a year of recovery.

A flash of red, Lucian grips his head and collapses on the floor, off-camera. Then, he is shown gripping his head and shaking in pain, alive, but *something* is happening to him.

STANISLAW

I can only imagine how much of a stress this will put on Rostkov - both on her people, and on her resources.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLOWED EXECUTIONERS' TENT - NIGHT

Said, Tzilla, and Larissa enter the large tent, which serves as a strategy room. Men and women look over a large map of

the continent centered in the room, but all stop and turn around once the trio enters. Saad and Larissa stand side-by-side to Tzilla, Saad crosses his hands like a professional, while Larissa is casually twirling a strand of hair in her hand, only stopping once she realizes all eyes are on her, trying to act the part of a professional. Tzilla stands before her Executioners, the stoic and determined look of a leader and a fighter on her face.

STANISLAW

I swear to whatever garden exists
in the distance, we will not be
getting any breaks soon, for this
might be the last fight Rostkov
finds itself in, giving the sheer
numbers that Cieslani hold over
our heads.

The Executioners stare into the camera, a PoV from Tzilla's perspective.

STANISLAW

But, we didn't make it this far by
lying down and giving up, did we?
If a civil war wasn't enough to
divide us, there may be hope for
us yet.

Tzilla gives an affirmative nod as the camera zooms in on her face, confident and ready to get down to business to defeat the Cieslani.

STANISLAW

As long as someone, anyone,
everyone is willing to fight. I
have hope that we can make it out
of this.

CUT TO BLACK.

STANISLAW

Ah, but I'm rambling again.
Tomorrow, we start anew.

END