

God of Toil

By

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FADE IN:

INT. ROYAL QUARTERS

A stone room lit by candles. A portrait with a gilded frame hangs on the wall: A regal figure, thin and proper, every inch of skin covered in leather and finery. He wears a golden mask with black pits for eyes, a callous expression, and long, antelope-like horns.

In front of the portrait, a man sits with legs folded, serene. PRINCE MATHIUS, 35. His back is bare, revealing an enormous, masterful tattoo of an ancient sigel of a dragon. He stares up at the portrait, his face unseen.

There's a knock at the door. He pulls on a mask that matches the one in the portrait.

EXT. GARRISON - NIGHT

A mighty stone testament to authority. Ornatly uniformed GUARDS wear the dragon sigil proudly, patrolling high walls and sporting helmets masked with ghoulish visages. Behind one of them, a pair of silhouettes slip up and over the wall in a blink.

INT. WINDING CORRIDOR

Torches cast light on stone walls. PRINCE REZNICK, 18, leans patiently against a wall. His posture is hunched, and his hands invisible beneath flowing sleeves. His mask sports a furious scowl and short, goat-like horns.

Prince Mathius emerges from behind the door in all his glory, towering over Reznick. He marches forward, eyes fixed ahead, arms folded behind his perfectly postured back, never acknowledging Reznick. Reznick ambles along behind him, sloping forward.

EXT. GARRISON

The two silhouettes drop down to the base of a tall wall with the slightest THUMP just as a guard rounds a corner.

THOMAS (55 and grizzled) and CYRIL (20 and severe despite a fresh face) are dressed in identical black shrouds. Beneath their hoods, they sport cleanly shaven heads with large scarred over 'X's on the backs of their skulls. Small, light blades and other arms litter their belts and straps, and they each carry a bow and arrow slung over a shoulder.

Thomas pulls Cyril closer by the neck, lifting a single, quieting finger to his lips.

INT. WINDING CORRIDOR

Mathius and Reznick round a corner to find two long lines of guards standing at the ready. They salute Mathius as he strides by them. He offers nothing in return, eyes fixed forward. Reznick steals fleeting, accusing glances at them before setting his sights back on the dirt at his feet.

EXT. GARRISON

Cyril follows behind Thomas as they speed across the dirt. Cyril scans his surroundings, uneasy.

CYRIL
(whispering)
Where is everyone?

Thomas says nothing, coming upon a door. He quickly maneuvers a small pick into a lock, and in an instant it opens for him.

INT. MAP ROOM

Thomas and Cyril rush into a room overflowing with scrolls and parchment. Thomas whips through the pages and pages littered upon a table. Cyril watches from the door, but sees nothing but conspicuous emptiness.

THOMAS
There!

Thomas just barely contains his elation, coming upon a MAP. He stuffs it into his sack, and jets past Cyril.

EXT. COURTYARD

A platoon of guards and soldiers sit patiently on their knees in the dirt, shoulder to shoulder, a picture of discipline. Mathius emerges onto a stage, and the men bow their heads all the way to the dirt. Behind Mathius, Reznick scans the worshippers, cautiously.

Thomas and Cyril reach the top of a high wall overlooking the gathering. Unseen, they freeze, shocked at what they find.

(CONTINUED)

THOMAS

Oh no...

The soldiers all rise in step, arms behind their backs.

THOMAS

We have to get out of here.

Cyril tugs on Thomas' sleeve, staring at Mathius, transfixed.

CYRIL

Thomas. That's the Prince. Here.
Now.

Thomas hops down off the wall and away from the spectacle, but Cyril lingers.

THOMAS

Cyril! Let's go!

Cyril draws an arrow from his quiver, and readies his bow, steadying it upon Mathius.

THOMAS

Boy, don't you dare! We have no
plan!

Cyril lets his arrow fly.

With the slightest tilt of his head, Mathius stops the arrow dead inches from his face, as though snatched by some invisible force. He spots Cyril atop the wall. The arrow shatters into a million splinters.

The soldiers draw their weapons and shoot to their feet. Reznick leaps and bounds like some wild cat, crossing the yard towards Cyril in a blink.

EXT. GARRISON

Cyril drops down off the wall and follows the fleeing Thomas. Reznick scales the wall with a couple bounds, and clears the distance between he and his prey with one great leap, landing between Cyril and Thomas.

Long, gnarly chains of flesh and tendon with bone spikes at the end drop down out from Reznick's sleeves. He swings them wildly at Cyril, slicing at air as Cyril retreats and draws a short sword.

(CONTINUED)

Cyril fights off Reznick's advances just long enough for Thomas to join the fray with a sword of his own. Reznick still nearly proves too much for the both of them, keeping them at a distance.

Reznick knocks Cyril to the dirt, slicing up his arm. He swings a chain wide behind him, but before he can whip it down upon Cyril, Thomas tangles it in his sword.

THOMAS

Run!

Reluctantly, Cyril obeys, sprinting past Thomas for the most distant wall, snatching his mentor's BAG along the way. Reznick turns his attention to Thomas, rushing towards him. But before Reznick can sink his teeth in, an unseen force whips Thomas sideways, into the waiting arms of a group of soldiers.

Reznick turns around, furious. He finds Mathius, standing coolly as soldiers race past him.

Reznick sets his sights back on Cyril, who just makes it to the top of the outermost wall. Cyril pauses atop his perch, looking to Thomas, who struggles against his captors.

THOMAS

Rufus lives!

Mathius regards Thomas, intrigued. The soldiers bond and gag him.

Reznick races towards the wall as Cyril leaps out into the deep, dark surrounding woods. Just as Reznick scales the wall and attempts to leap after him, an invisible force snatches him back, setting him back down atop the wall.

Reznick throws down his arms in a huff, shooting Mathius a furious glare. Mathius is indifferent. Reznick looks back into the deep, endless woods, where there's no hint of Cyril.

Through blackness, Cyril sprints, furious and afraid.

OPENING CREDITS

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

EXT. BOND FIRE

A massive fire in a clearing. Thomas sits nearest to it, but behind him is a massive crowd of Nameless, all with their bald heads and black shrouds, Cyril among them. Thomas stares pensively into the flames.

THOMAS

There is a war. Old as time. Keeps repeating itself, different faces, different words, same sides. Those who have, and those who don't. Any guess who we are?

A range of grunts is his only response.

THOMAS

They think us crude and crass. We who reap their fields and build their walls. We're less than slaves. We're tools. Beasts of burden. Everything they do is to build a better lie. That they are mighty, and we are weak. They drape themselves in finery, tell us we're unworthy of their faces. But we know better. We know their cruelty.

Heads nod solemnly. Many sport scars burns.

THOMAS

They tell us they know best. They beat us down and fill their coffers for our sake. Too many believe it. What about you boys and girls?

Grunts and chuckles. Tom lifts himself to his feet, and sets his sights on his audience.

THOMAS

They don't know our numbers. They don't know our strength. They indulge and we endure, and everyday they'll soften while we harden. We'll blacken our hearts. Callous our hands. Bloody our faces. Just as wind carves mountains and the tide beats back the shore, inch by inch we will tear at them. We the orphans. We the mongrels!

Thomas works the crowd into a frenzy, earning a cheer.

(CONTINUED)

THOMAS

The forgotten, the lost, the unmourned. The unwashed, the unloved, the unyielding. The brutal, the filthy, the ugly. The onerous, the odorous, the anonymous. The Nameless!

The crowd roars. Cyril hardly stirs.

INT. CAVE - NIGHT

The flicker of fire casts light on a stone floor. Tiny feet grip and tense as a razor SCRAPES. Locks of soft blond hair fall by toes.

CYRIL(VO)

They come for those who need it most. The abandoned, the orphaned, the unwanted. The Nameless.

Thomas grips the face of a young blond CYRIL (4, in rags) in one hand. With the other, he slides a razor blade across Cyril's scalp.

The Old Man draws blood. Cyril winces and trembles, but doesn't make a sound. Thomas pauses, and glares coldly. Cyril hardens.

CYRIL(VO)

Victims of The Godkings. We only take the youngest. Wait too long and softness creeps in.

EXT. FORREST - NIGHT

PEASANTS flee desperately through trees, pursued by soldiers.

CYRIL(VO)

For countless generations, the Godkings have lorded over the common man. Decadent, privileged, they've long made a spectacle of their superiority. They claim to wear their masks to deny us the burden of their unattainable beauty. With might and cruelty, they've reigned over a kingdom of slaves, stamping out whatever opposition their whims should meet.

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In the tree tops, members of The Nameless, Thomas at the head, wait to pounce, all with shaved heads, X scars, and black shrouds. As the soldiers approach, they descend.

CYRIL(VO)

Since the beginning of the reign,
in every shadowy corner, The
Nameless have resisted. As an
underground nation of brothers and
sisters, we've trained, we've
fought, and we've endured.

The Nameless tear the soldiers to pieces. Merciless.
Shameless. Assassins through and through. Over a hill, the
glow of raging fire begins to emanate, and The Nameless,
save for a few brave/foolish souls, escape into the night.

A shadowy, horned figure emerges atop the hill, a silhouette
among fire. He wears decadent, bold robes, and a demonic,
ram-horned mask with a malevolent snarl. He is PRINCE
DARNETT.

Thomas calls for the stragglers to follow, but they rush
after Darnett. They're engulfed in flame instantaneously.

EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

The Nameless do what they can for a devastated small
village. Among the scorched wreckage of a small hut, a
TODDLER wails, sitting unattended in the dirt. Thomas
approaches it gently, and lifts it into his arms, trying to
soothe it.

CYRIL(VO)

We've always faced long odds.
Cowards call it a hopeless crusade.
That doesn't change its
righteousness.

INT. CAVE - NIGHT

Thomas approaches a flickering torch. He holds his hand over
the flame.

CYRIL(VO)

We've denied ourselves every
comfort. Every waking moment we cut
away at our own weakness. We take
no heirs, abandon every futile
grasp at immortality. Even in the
face of unassailable power, we've
never blinked.

Slowly and methodically, Thomas lowers his hand, trying as best he can to keep it steady. Inevitably, he pulls it away.

EXT. SPARRING CIRCLE - DAY

Dozens of boys with shaved heads crowd around a dirt circle, CHEERING and HOLLERING. A ten year old CYRIL and a much larger young BULLY wrestle in mud at the center. Cyril puts up a fierce and noble effort, but the Bully easily pins him, shoving his face in the mud.

The bully rises to his feet, and lifts his arms to the sky triumphantly to great fanfare. Thomas shoves his way through the crowd, and freezes the Bully with a stern glare.

CYRIL(VO)

Our sacred law said the greatest
honour was to serve. That it fell
to the strong to lift up the weak.
Steel would sharpen steel, and if
we were to stand against tyranny,
it would be together.

The Bully's exuberance fades to shame. He reaches down, and helps Cyril to his feet, dusting him off.

CYRIL(VO)

Of course, now and then, someone
can't help but rise above.

INT. CAVE

Dozens of The Nameless, including a teenaged Cyril, crowd around a cave wall, shoving and jockeying for position.

CYRIL(VO)

I remember the first time I heard
his name. Everyone does. It was the
very moment our resistance became a
revolution.

Thomas emerges at the head of the crowd, a full bag slung over his shoulder. He empties it out, and countless soldier's masks clatter along the ground.

CYRIL(VO)

Rufus.

EXT. CAMP

Cyril and Thomas emerge from the night. They come upon the back of a mountain of a man sitting legs crossed within inches of a huge, raging bonfire. The X on the back of his skull is different from any other, a little lopsided and rounded.

CYRIL(VO)

As a rule, The Nameless cherished anonymity. We loathed the garishness and grandeur of our enemy. But people couldn't help but whisper about him. Some said he was the last of a forgotten race. Others said he had divine blood.

Cyril and Thomas sit down across from RUFUS, 25. He's a man seemingly made of stone, with steely eyes and a perpetually furrowed brow. Beside him, an enormous spear with an ornate, unique blade and a big stone insignia stands spiked into the ground: PENANCE.

CYRIL(VO)

To see him wield his great spear was like watching an avalanche bear down upon you. They called it Penance. They said only he could lift it. Excuses had to be made for his greatness. But when I finally met him, his origins couldn't be clearer. He wasn't born. He was forged. He knew no rest. Even then, just sitting there, still as could be, war raged behind his eyes. A God of Toil.

Rufus finally looks to Cyril, impeccably steady.

RUFUS

Where you from?

Cyril gulps, starstruck, but quickly hardens.

CYRIL

Nowhere.

Rufus nods his head approvingly.

RUFUS

Same.

INT. ROYAL CHAMBER, TOWER

Thomas races up the winding staircase of an enormous stone tower.

CYRIL(VO)

Every corner called him something different. Zero. The Balance. I'll never forget when he won his new name.

Rufus emerges from the top, flesh searing, clothes singed, Darnett's mask in hand. He almost indifferently shoves the mask into Thomas' arms.

CYRIL(VO)

God Killer.

Thomas follows Rufus back down the staircase.

EXT. CAMP - NIGHT

Rufus, Thomas, and Cyril all sit around a raging fire with countless other Lost at a great celebration. Cyril and Thomas smile and pat each others' backs, passing Mathius' mask back and forth. Rufus simply stares into the fire with a profound exhaustion.

CYRIL(VO)

He took no joy in the greatest triumph in the history of The Nameless. At the time, I thought it noble. A great warrior incapable of satisfaction. Peace was his enemy.

Atop a pike sits Darnett's mask.

CYRIL(VO)

It wasn't long before he added to his legend.

INT. HALL

A massive portrait of four Godkings. Mathius stands at the center, with Darnett to his left, who has a hand placed atop the shoulder of a FIVE YEAR OLD Reznick. To Mathius' left stands a delicate, feminine figure sporting a mask with a mournful expression, and tiny upturned horns: THE PRINCESS.

First, Darnett disappears from the portrait. Then the Princess.

EXT. CAMP - LATER

A second pike. Half of The Princess' mask.

BLACK

CYRIL(VO)

As soon as he came, he was gone.
Without a word, without an
explanation. The Godkings said he'd
died. No one believes it. What
could kill a God Killer?

END FLASHBACK

INT. CAVE

A small cave, where snow and sleet howl outside. By the light of a fire, Cyril rummages through Thomas' bag, one of his arms in a sling. He finds the map they'd stolen, but something else too: a small scroll. He unfurls it.

CYRIL(VO)

A greater victory awaits.

Cyril grins eagerly as he scans the document.

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

A cozy room, maybe a bit too small. Dawn creeps in through an open window. A very different Rufus, 35, sits up in a cozy double bed, shirtless, plump. He runs a hand through his beard and shaggy hair, sleepy.

Beside him in bed lays ELIZABETH, 30, fast asleep. She's diminutive and petite, especially by comparison. She wears a comfy gown, and her beauty is subdued and almost common. He shakes her gently.

RUFUS

Time to get up.

She stirs only slightly, and answers hazily:

ELIZABETH

Don't want to.

RUFUS

Shocker.

Rufus strains to his feet, leaving her there.

MONTAGE

INT. KITCHEN

Rufus slaves over a stove, working pans and pots expertly. Elizabeth practically sleepwalks into the room, and he automatically hands her a cup a tea. Before she can even finish sliding into her chair, he slides a beautiful plate of eggs onto the table in front of her.

INT. HOUSE HALLWAY

Rufus, on his hands and knees in a cute little corridor, scrubs carefully at the tiles of his floor, wash bucket beside him.

EXT. HOUSE

Rufus, outside his pretty little stone and wood cottage of a home, chops away at some shrubs with a big pair of scissors. He grabs a smaller pair, and prunes at some flowers.

EXT. FRUIT STAND

Rufus, at a wooden cart in an idyllic village, picks up and examines two tomatoes. He looks them over, tapping them, and weighing them individually in each hand.

EXT. HOUSE PORCH

Back outside his house Rufus holds a plate of food precariously in one hand as he tries to fend off his huge dog, BANDIT. Bandit snaps and jumps at him repeatedly, viciously, seemingly uninterested in the food.

Rufus manages to set the plate of food down behind his back, and flee back into the house, Bandit still barking at him through the screen door.

INT. LIVING ROOM

A male PATIENT sits on a wooden chair in the center of the room, all the rest of the furniture pushed to the corners of the room. Elizabeth sits beside the patient on a stool, stitching closed a wound on the man's arm. Rufus hovers over her shoulder, attentively.

(CONTINUED)

ELIZABETH

Would you?

RUFUS

Yeah.

Rufus snips off the loose remaining strand of the man's stitch. Elizabeth blindly raises her hand, eyes fixed on her handiwork.

ELIZABETH

Can you?

RUFUS

On it.

Rufus takes the needle out of her hand and places some loose bandage in the vacated space. Rufus places a dressing over the wound as she wraps the bandage around the Patient's arm.

ELIZABETH

Again.

RUFUS

Right.

Rufus snips at the the remaining bandage as Elizabeth removes her gloves. He happily takes them from her, and gives her a congratulatory kiss on the top of her head. She grins.

EXT. FORREST CLEARING

Rufus and Elizabeth sit on a blanket atop green grass across from a lone, immense tree. She leans against him, reading a book as he sips from a glass bottle of water, skillfully sketching the landscape.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Elizabeth settles into bed as Rufus blows out a couple candles. He plops down into bed, wearily. As soon as he pulls the sheets over himself, Elizabeth snuggles up against him, finding a familiar nook in his shoulder. He clutches her hand, kisses her fingers, and blows out the last light.

END MONTAGE

INT. BEDROOM - LATER

Rufus lies awakes in the deep night. He looks over and sees Elizabeth fast asleep. Softly, he rolls out of bed.

EXT. HOME

Rufus steps out the front door and into moonlight. He stretches his arms as he crosses his lawn towards a shed. He pops the door open.

INT. SHED

A dusty and musty collection of tools and tomes. In the center stands the base a thick tree trunk, cut just beneath the ceiling and wrapped in padding. Rufus exhales, swinging his arms back and forth, loosening up.

He drives a fist into the tree's padding. It's like THUNDER. He stands in front of his makeshift heavy bag and hurls more expert fists, quick, short and tight. The shed practically trembles.

EXT. MARKET

An assemblage of tents and carts in the village square. Cyril, hood pulled over head, hovers along the edge. He spots Rufus, leather sack slung over his shoulder, thoroughly inspecting some fruit, picking and choosing for a small basket.

Cyril takes a step back behind a house, watching from around a corner.

RUFUS

You're killing me, Marty. Whatever happened to first pick?

MARTY, 50, smiles from behind his cart. He's a short man with grey stubble and blots of dirt all over.

MARTY

First pick of crap is still crap.

RUFUS

Take some pride in your work.

(CONTINUED)

Rufus overhears some ruckus. He turns his head to find a trio of thugs (ROVER, REAPER, AND CRAG) harass a vendor. They wear raggedy bastardizations of Royal Guard uniform, and Crag, their leader, wears a wooden mask that covers half his face. He cruelly upturns a table of veggies.

MARTY

Looks like someone's cutting in line.

Rufus frowns and bows his head as the thugs approach Marty's cart. Rufus tightens up his sack as Crag looks over the meager crop.

CRAG

What's wrong with this market?
Don't you people know how to farm?

RUFUS

Don't take it personally, Marty.
It's a tough season.

Rufus eyes Crag's shoulder: a crude tattoo of the royal sigel, much sloppier and less detailed than what we've seen so far.

Crag's gaze shoots to Rufus.

CRAG

You like what you see?

RUFUS

Sorry. It's a nice tattoo. Really close.

Crag smashes a tomato with his fist.

CRAG

What did you say?

RUFUS

Come on. Is that necessary? What'd the tomato do? You know what kind margins Marty here works on?

CRAG

Maybe he should serve up a better product.

RUFUS

That's not his fault. I picked him clean.

Crag takes a step nearer to Rufus.

(CONTINUED)

CRAG
Is that so?

Crag nods towards Rufus' bag.

CRAG
That your's?

Cyril surveys the situation carefully. Rufus just shakes his head a little, and hands over his sack. Crag and his hanger-ons SNICKER, then continue along their way.

Cyril disappears back around his corner, confused. Rufus starts rifling through the fruit all over again.

EXT. PATHWAY - LATER

Rufus shuffles along the wooded path, lugging a new, half-empty bag over his shoulder. He pauses when he hears a vague RUSTLE, looking over his shoulder. He sees nothing.

Rufus turns back around, and finds Cyril standing across from him. Cyril quickly kneels, bowing his head.

CYRIL
Master Rufus. I come begging your service.

Rufus, annoyed, walks right past Cyril.

RUFUS
Go home, kid.

Cyril hurries back to his feet, following Rufus.

CYRIL
Sir, the situation is quite dire.

RUFUS
It usually is. Look, I'm no Master. Go find somebody else.

CYRIL
There is nobody else.

Rufus slows to a stop. He SIGHS, and turns towards Cyril. He notices the bandages around his arm, damp with blood.

RUFUS
We've got to get that looked at.

EXT. HOME - LATER

Rufus and Cyril walk side by side, out from the woods and into a clearing.

RUFUS

Liz will fix you up. If anyone can.

They come upon the idyllic little cottage: stone, wood, and flowers. In the yard, a birdhouse sits high atop a pole.

Bandit shoots up from the porch, rabid and furious as Rufus approaches the gate. Rufus gently pushes Cyril behind him.

RUFUS

Nice to see you too.

Rufus pulls a hunk of meat out from his bag as he maneuvers Cyril and himself around the hateful barking and snarling. He tosses the meat into the grass, but the dog doesn't leave him alone, following him all the way to the door.

INT. HOME

Safe inside the house, Rufus slams the door shut. It's a cozy place, much too cramped for a man of his dimensions. He seems on the precipice of knocking over some cute knick knack with every move.

Rufus smiles politely at Bandit through a window, but the dog still HOWLS, alarmed. As Rufus gets out of sight, it gives up, and finds its gift of meat out in the yard.

Rufus sighs as he turns to Cyril.

RUFUS

Precious, isn't he? Liz keeps telling me it just takes time.

Rufus pulls off his cloak and drops it down on a hanger as he slides around Cyril and towards the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

A workman like kitchen. Rufus sets down his bag on the counter, and lights a small fire in an oven.

RUFUS

You have time to find a favorite tea in The Nameless? I doubt it. I'll figure something out. Probably nothing sweet.

(CONTINUED)

Cyril takes a seat at the kitchen table, evaluating his surroundings with barely disguised contempt. Rufus puts a kettle on a rack above the fire, then plops down across from Cyril.

CYRIL
What's she like?

RUFUS
Great. Sometimes awful. Usual wife stuff. She's a doctor. Two hands usually isn't enough. I manage the tools, assist in the surgery.

CYRIL
Are you good at it?

RUFUS
Not even a little. Heavy hands.

CYRIL
Sons?

Rufus' smile falters, if only for a moment.

RUFUS
No. We've tried for kids, but...
No.

Cyril shakes his head, in bitter disbelief.

CYRIL
All this time... I thought you were waiting. Getting ready.

RUFUS
For what?

CYRIL
I don't know. For something. For now.

Rufus heads for the counter. He begins slicing up some bread, meat, and veggies.

RUFUS
How'd you find me?

CYRIL
Thomas. He kept it secret as long as he could.

Rufus pauses, surprised. He tosses Cyril a jar of preserves. Cyril struggles opening it.

RUFUS

He figured he owed it to me.

CYRIL

What do you owe?

Rufus grabs a pair of plates from a shelf and sets them on the counter, then gets back to his preparation. Cyril gives up on the jar.

RUFUS

Not a thing.

CYRIL

You left us. Abandoned us. To be an errand boy? A handmaiden?

RUFUS

A lot of heavy lifting is involved. Mule's more apt.

CYRIL

You were the best of us. Better than any of us could ever be.

RUFUS

I'm not up on my literature, but I'm pretty sure that's heresy. Always the same. You were all hypocrites. Making up stories. Couldn't just be sweat, blood. And for what? Picking off the stragglers at the back of the pack. Never meant anything.

CYRIL

Nonsense. You didn't when we couldn't. There was no one else, and now there's no one left.

Rufus bristles. The kettle whistles, blowing steam. He pulls it off the rack and sets it aside.

RUFUS

You may be missing the obvious here, but I'm no good to you. If it makes you feel better tossing blame around, by all means. You're not getting anything else out of this.

Cyril shoots to his feet and gets in Rufus' face. Rufus ignores him, fixed on assembling a plate.

(CONTINUED)

CYRIL

You'll let the lives of countless brothers mean nothing?

RUFUS

They mean nothing whatever I do.

CYRIL

The fight is important. There are battles to be won. I still believe. Tell me you don't.

RUFUS

I don't.

Cyril smacks one of Rufus' plates off the counter and onto the floor, making a mess. Rufus finally looks at him, annoyed.

CYRIL

The Great Rufus. What could happen that would turn him into this?

RUFUS

What's that?

CYRIL

A coward. You sought comfort. Probably in the first whore's arms you -

Cyril grabs Rufus' shoulder. Rufus swats his hand away. Cyril reaches again, and Rufus yanks him by his shirt and forcefully sits him back down in his chair, powerful, terrifying.

RUFUS

You have no idea. None.

Rufus walks away, and accidentally steps on the plate, shattering it. Annoyed, he bends down and starts picking up the food and debris.

RUFUS

I'm not who you think. Not if I can help it.

Rufus stands and grabs the jar of preserves off the table, opening it easily. He puts some on the intact plate, which he sets in front of Cyril.

(CONTINUED)

RUFUS

The fight's over. It was before it started. Let it go. Find something. Someone. We've buried enough men.

CYRIL

The Nameless aren't dead.

Rufus looks to Cyril, confused.

CYRIL

They're being taken alive, and they're being kept that way. We... I don't know why.

Cyril drops a scroll on the kitchen table.

CYRIL

We gambled everything on this. It's a map. We finally know where they all are.

Rufus winces

CYRIL

Death is a gift they've been denied. Your brothers can be saved. You think there's peace in this life? Give them a chance at it. That's what you owe.

Rufus considers. He looks out the window.

EXT. HOME

Out from the woods behind the house, Elizabeth emerges, hood pulled over head. She makes sure to catch Rufus' eye through the window. He smiles warmly at her.

INT. HOME

Elizabeth enters the kitchen, finding Rufus alone. He stands at the sink, emptying his tea and kettle.

ELIZABETH

Everything alright?

Rufus wipes his hands on his shirt and hands her the ready plate. He massages the back of her neck with one hand, kissing her atop the head.

(CONTINUED)

RUFUS
I missed you.

She grins, almost mockingly.

ELIZABETH
Aww.

EXT. HOME - NIGHT

The middle of a black night. Just at the border of the woods stands Cyril. He watches the house.

INT. BEDROOM

Rufus lies alone in bed, sweating, thrashing.

FLASHBACK

EXT. HUT

YOUNG RUFUS is a tiny, pudgy little boy of 5 years old. He panics as his thin, kind, handsome FATHER bends down to offer meaningless comfort.

FATHER
I have to go.

YOUNG RUFUS
No!

FATHER
You'll understand later. You'll be proud.

YOUNG RUFUS
Please!

FATHER
This is a good thing. A noble thing.

Rufus SHRIEKS and claws for a grip at him as a couple of Soldiers escort him away.

END FLASHBACK

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Rufus wakes with a start in bed. He see the spot beside him empty. He quickly rolls over, and sees Elizabeth sitting in the far corner of the room, a warm cup in hand.

ELIZABETH
You alright?

RUFUS
Yeah... sorry. Did I wake you?

ELIZABETH
You know how it is. You've got a lot of hard pointy parts.

RUFUS
Still? I'll get fatter.

Elizabeth SNICKERS.

ELIZABETH
So what was it this time?

She regards Rufus, patiently yet seriously.

RUFUS
My Dad.

Elizabeth nods, then crawls back into bed beside him.

ELIZABETH
Haven't heard from him in a while.

RUFUS
Plenty else to feel guilty about.

Elizabeth maneuvers her head into the crook of his shoulder.

ELIZABETH
Stop it. Plenty to be proud of, too.

Elizabeth shuts her eyes, at peace.

RUFUS
Liz?

ELIZABETH
I want you to measure how much you want to say whatever it is you want to say against how badly I want to sleep.

(CONTINUED)

Rufus kisses her head.

RUFUS

I love you. So much. Moments like this... I never thought I'd know them. Never thought I'd deserve them.

ELIZABETH

Mm-hmm.

She stirs slightly, and he pauses. She settles, and he begins again, quietly, squeezing her hand.

RUFUS

I have to go. If I didn't, I wouldn't. I know I said it was over. If there were anybody else... I'll come back. If it's even possible. If you'll even have me.

Elizabeth GROANS and rolls over, fast asleep. Rufus smiles as she begins SNORING loudly.

EXT. HOME

Cyril leans against a tree by the walking path, arms folded. He hears a door shut softly, and Rufus strides out, wearing loose shrouds.

Rufus approaches his makeshift birdfeeder. He lifts off the wooden birdhouse and sets it down gently. He grabs the pole that supported it, and slowly pulls it up and out of the dirt. Crumbling earth eventually reveals the base: a tight leather sheath, wrapped around something.

Rufus bends down and pulls off the sheath, revealing the blade and insignia of his famous spear Penance. He frowns, and then pulls the sheath back over the blade, tying it down tightly.

CYRIL

The mighty Penance deserves more respect.

RUFUS

I always hated that people called it that.

Rufus walks past Cyril. Cyril follows after him.

(CONTINUED)

RUFUS

Where do you think you're going?

CYRIL

With you.

RUFUS

Not with that arm. You want that thing to fall off?

CYRIL

I will not stand aside while my brothers suffer.

RUFUS

I can see what's coming. Follow me, you're dead. Stay here. Get better. I'm getting The Nameless home, then I'm coming home. That's the deal, that's it.

CYRIL

And if you fail? If you're not enough?

RUFUS

All the more reason for you to stick around. Have to be careful with The Last of The Nameless.

Cyril finally stops in his tracks, disappointed and annoyed. Rufus slows to a stop.

RUFUS

She'll need help. It's too much to handle for one person around here. You'll have to go into town now and then. She hates crowds.

CYRIL

Why didn't you wait to say goodbye?

RUFUS

Because she'd have made me stay.

Grudgingly, Cyril nods. Rufus continues his trek. Cyril calls after him.

CYRIL

I'll watch over her.

Rufus pauses. He turns to Cyril, and forces a soft smile.

(CONTINUED)

RUFUS
I hope she helps you.

Rufus sets back along his way. Cyril watches him go, confused.

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

Elizabeth stirs to sun pouring through the window. She rolls over, and tosses an arm over the empty side of the bed.

Elizabeth opens her eyes, surprised. She sits up, and look around the room. She calls through the open door.

ELIZABETH
Rufus?

INT. HOME

Elizabeth, clutching her robe, walks barefooted down the stairs, scanning the empty house. She pokes her head around a corner for a peek at the kitchen.

ELIZABETH
Where's breakfast?

She slides some drapes aside, and something catches her eye. She storms out of the house.

EXT. HOME

Elizabeth strides down the porch and through the grass, and finds her birdhouse sitting on the ground, next to a big hole in the dirt. She mutters through clenched teeth:

ELIZABETH
Asshole.

Irritated, she looks down the beaten path and towards the woods.

ELIZABETH
This is your fault, isn't it?!

Slowly, bashfully, Cyril emerges from his hiding spot behind a tree. She stomps over to him, and slaps him mightily across the face.

(CONTINUED)

ELIZABETH

Why can't you people just leave him alone?!

Cyril stands almost as a statue. She takes a calming breath, noticing his bandaged arm. She pulls it nearer her eyes, and gives it quick once over. In a huff, she stomps back towards the house.

ELIZABETH

Come on!

Cyril flinches, then follows behind her. She turns for a moment, and points a demanding finger at him.

ELIZABETH

You better cook.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Tensely and uncertainly, Cyril turns on the stove, and cracks a couple eggs into a frying pan. Elizabeth berates him from the table.

ELIZABETH

What don't you get? He doesn't want to be part of this. He's needed here.

CYRIL

It's difficult for women to understand...

ELIZABETH

Excuse me?

CYRIL

Your husband made an oath. The brotherhood comes first.

ELIZABETH

Then what are you doing here, huh? You got flat feet or something?

Cyril exhales, keeping his composure as he clumsily flips an egg.

CYRIL

Do you know who he is?

(CONTINUED)

ELIZABETH

A lot better than you. Trust me.

CYRIL

I mean what he's done. What he's accomplished.

ELIZABETH

A couple masks on a wall somewhere?

CYRIL

You should be proud. He has a chance to save lives.

ELIZABETH

Is that what you think this is? One man kills for duty, gets killed for vengeance. Then the vengeful are slaughtered for their insubordination, and the slaughterers butchered for their tyranny. A cruel king is unseated by a crueller one. On and on, round and round. Nobody thinks they're wrong, yet everyone ends up dead.

Cyril puts his disastrous eggs on a plate, and quietly sets them in front of Elizabeth. Cyril takes a seat.

ELIZABETH

Your 'God Killer' made me an oath too. He's through hurting people. He and I help people.

She shoves the eggs aside, again grabbing Cyril's bandaged arm. She looks it over.

CYRIL

Justice done is good. There is no freedom with a Godking on the throne. You should be proud.

Elizabeth looks up at Cyril, scornfully.

ELIZABETH

Most people who pound the drum for justice or freedom don't care for either. All they really want is their turn with the whip.

She flicks his wound. He shudders, startled.

INT. THRONE ROOM

An ornate hall with high ceilings and sprawling, open space. A throne sits atop a raised platform. A pair of soldiers try to steady a magnificent painting on the wall: Mathius regally stands with a younger Reznick of noticeably improved posture, his hand placed coldly atop his shoulder.

Mathius watches the soldiers delicately maneuver. He gestures mildly with a flick of his wrist.

MATHIUS

To the left.

At the other end of the hall, Reznick seethes impatiently, the leather of his gloves audibly STRETCHING as he squeezes his fist. He stares at Mathius' back.

MATHIUS

Something on your mind, dear nephew?

Reznick gathers himself and takes a step forward.

REZNICK

I could have caught that young Lost welp. You should have let me.

MATHIUS

We fight on our terms. Not their's. Let them die within our walls.

REZNICK

You live in palaces of fear. Why gild a cage? Our enemy mocks us. Questions our valor.

MATHIUS

Don't trouble yourself with the tittering of little people.

REZNICK

Lend me some soldiers. Let me find them. Snuff them out. If we let them go free, they'll assemble their forces.

MATHIUS

To what ends? They'll never build strength enough to match ours. But for us to venture out... meet them on their field... why expose ourselves to harm them? We'll

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MATHIUS (cont'd)
consolidate here at the stronghold.
There's no force they can gather we
won't strike down.

Reznick throws down his hands.

REZNICK
They'll spread and fester forever
if we let them, inspire more to
their derangement.

MATHIUS
We who beat back the darkness need
not fear fools.

REZNICK
If we were to find their nest...

Mathius finally turns towards Reznick, firm.

MATHIUS
I'll have no more of this. We'll
send word to our forces. There's no
harm they can inflict worth risking
our line.

REZNICK
You doubt me. You fear my failure,
me sullyng our name. I am not my
father! His weakness is not mine!

Mathius turns his attention back to the hanging of the
painting.

MATHIUS
Don't speak of a Godking that way.
You will stay by my side, under my
guard. The day will come when it
falls to you and you alone to carry
on our line. Nothing comes before
the family.

Mathius emphatically raises his hand. The soldiers hanging
the painting halt instantly, their armor rattling as though
suddenly an invisible hand had seized them.

MATHIUS
There. Perfect...

Reznick storms out of the trone room as Mathius admires the
painting.

EXT. STABLES - NIGHT

A line of horses stand beneath a barn by moon light. Reznick approaches one, looking over his shoulder carefully. He hastily undoes one's straps, and escapes into the deep, dark woods.

EXT. HOME - DAY

Cyril stands guard a few paces in front of the house, arms folded, stoically staring into the woods on a beautiful summer afternoon. Elizabeth watches him through the window, frowning.

Elizabeth emerges onto the porch, Bandit at her side.

ELIZABETH

It's senseless to stay out here all night. Come in. I'll fix you a bed.

CYRIL

The Nameless eschew all comforts.

ELIZABETH

I'm aware of that. Doesn't make it any less stupid.

Elizabeth waits patiently. Stubbornly, Cyril sits down in the dirt. Bandit leaves her, and plops down right next to him, as friendly as could be.

Elizabeth sighs, holding the front door open.

ELIZABETH

You're going to get rained on.
That's like a hundred percent.

Elizabeth disappears into the house. Cyril cocks an eyebrow, and looks up at the cloudless sky.

EXT. HOME - LATER

Torrential downpour rains down on Cyril. Poor Bandit lays next to him, soaked to the bone. Finally, the dog's loyalty falters, and he escapes to the porch. Beneath the awning, he shakes himself off.

INT. GUEST ROOM

A humble room with a single sized bed. By candlelight, Elizabeth sets out pillows and linens. She peers out the window, checking out Cyril.

ELIZABETH

Idiot.

EXT. DARK WOODS

In some distant spot, in the same howling wind and rain, Rufus sits beneath the trunk of a big tree. He fidgets and shifts, trying to find some semblance of comfort among the mud and roots.

FLASHBACK

EXT. DESERT

The plump young RUFUS, covered in rags, follows a ways behind Thomas through hot, windy desolation. Thomas calls over his shoulder, irritated.

THOMAS

Would you go away?! I told you: you can't come!

Rufus wears heartbreak and shame on his face beneath a mask of dirt and grime, his chin buried in his chest as he plods along with tiny, timid steps.

THOMAS

Too old! Too weak! Too fat! There! You happy? You made me say it! I'm sparing you, boy! This is a kindness!

Rufus wipes at his sniffling nose, but continues along. Thomas sets his eyes back on the path ahead. He GROANS.

THOMAS

Would you at least pick up the pace if you're in such a hurry to die?!

Thomas grudgingly waves Rufus over. Rufus eagerly quickens his gait.

END FLASH BACK

EXT. DARK WOODS

Rufus shifts beneath his tree. Over head, a huge, canopy like leaf finally collapses under the strain of collecting water, dumping all over Rufus. He SIGHS, and rises to his feet.

EXT. WALKING PATH

Rufus leans into howling rain and wind, walking a lonely road. He squints up from beneath his hood, and spots a simple Inn, with warm light seeping out from its windows.

INT. ROADSIDE INN

A warm, cozy place. The INN KEEPER, a withered old man, stands behind a counter near a staircase. His weary eyes float up to the door as Rufus opens and shuts it, wiping his feet and shaking himself off before approaching the desk.

RUFUS
Beautiful night.

In no mood for chit chat, the Inn Keeper points behind his shoulder to a listing of prices as he reaches for the registry.

INN KEEPER
Half now, half when you leave. Stew
will be ready in a few if you want
to take a seat.

Rufus nods and smiles as he reaches into a pocket and hands the Inn Keeper some coins. He signs into the registry as the old man pours him some tea. Rufus accepts it graciously.

Rufus strides into the common space. He frowns knowingly as he notices a familiar trio of thugs staring at him: Crag, Rover, and Reaper.

Crag takes a swig from a cup as Rufus finds a table as far away as he can manage, sets his spear down on the floor, and drops onto a bench, his back turned to them.

Rufus sips his tea quietly. He winces as he hears chairs sliding across the floor and feet shuffling toward him.

(CONTINUED)

Crag plops down next to Rufus, his two goons hovering over either shoulder. Rufus smiles politely at all them, sipping tea.

CRAG

Haven't seen you around these parts much.

RUFUS

Oh you know... just passing through. Old bones couldn't carry me further. Lovely scenery.

CRAG

Where you headed?

RUFUS

Gonna catch up with some family.

Crag grunts, nodding. Rover sits down on the other side of Rufus, glaring a hole through him. Rufus raises his cup to the man.

CRAG

There were rumors of a man passing through this area some time back. One of The Nameless.

Rufus shakes his head dumbly.

RUFUS

Which are...?

CRAG

Rebel peasant scum. Enemy to all proud loyalists. Are you loyal to those who beat back the darkness?

RUFUS

Of course. Everybody hates darkness.

Crag grins. He looks down to the spear at their feet.

CRAG

What's that?

RUFUS

An old man's walking stick.

CRAG

What's with the sheath.

RUFUS

It's an heirloom. Keeps it tidy.
I'm sentimental.

Crag bends down towards it.

CRAG

Mind if I have a look?

Rufus kicks the spear backwards, rolling a few paces across the floor behind them. He looks at Crag, very sternly.

RUFUS

Yes.

Crag's thugs stand to their feet, looming over Rufus. Rufus lightens up, smiling and patting Crag once on the shoulder.

RUFUS

Do you know who I am?

CRAG

Should I?

RUFUS

Not at all. That's my point. Why treat strangers like this? What's to gain? In all likelihood, I'm just some poor farmer or peddler with nothing even worth stealing. What do you get out of bullying me? Why pick a fight?

Rover and Reaper make their way towards the spear.

CRAG

And if you're not some poor farmer or peddler?

RUFUS

IF I weren't - big if - then I wouldn't be worth your trouble. You boys aren't soldiers. Don't play at it. Trust me, it's miserable. The wise man fights only when he needs to, which is almost never.

CRAG

The righteous man fights whenever he has to, which is almost always.

(CONTINUED)

RUFUS

Well I guess we discovered the difference between smart and righteous. That's enough for a night, isn't it?

Rover and Reaper both reach down, grabbing at the spear. They try in vain to lift it. Crag observes them, then looks to Rufus, confused.

CRAG

What's the trick?

RUFUS

It's really freaking heavy is the trick.

Rufus rubs his face and SIGHS, annoyed. Reaper tugs on the spear's sheath, revealing the distinct and ornate blade and The Nameless's insignia on the shaft. Their eyes bulge, and the thugs all reach clumsily for their swords.

Crag is closest so Rufus handles him first. He kicks out the bench on which they sit, and slams his head into the table. Rover and Reaper begin swiping wildly at Rufus, and he dodges with little trouble.

The thugs swing so amateurishly that he has to protect them from themselves. A thrust from Reaper misses him and nearly penetrates Rover. Rufus' quickly shoves the potential skewer aside, and that's when Rover catches him with a kick in the back.

Rufus stumbles towards the desk and the stairs, winded. The thugs follow after him, forcing him up the stairs as he backpedals and parries their strikes. The Inn Keeper, horrified, ducks beneath his desk.

Rufus maneuvers around the slices of Reaper and along a balcony overlooking the common area, huffing and puffing. A great swing misses so badly that the thug crashes through the railing and loses grip of his sword. Rufus barely grabs him by the back of his tunic before he tumbles head first to the floor.

Totally oblivious, Rover charges at Rufus. Rufus kicks him in the chest, but then loses his balance, falling off the balcony along with Reaper. He turns the both of them in time to land beneath the thug, cushioning their fall as they smash through a table.

(CONTINUED)

Rufus GROANS, trying to catch his breath. Unharmed and ungrateful, Reaper starts punching him across the face. Above them, Rover leaps off the balcony and down at them, sword first.

Rufus rolls backwards, pulling Reaper out of the way along with him. Just then, Crag nearly blindsides him. Rufus tries to dodge, but catches a little bit of blade across his face. He stumbles away from the trio and into a bench as they pull themselves together.

Rufus tries to catch his breath as Crag and his thugs stalk towards him. They descend upon him, and he rolls behind them, within inches of his spear. He kicks it up into his hands, and with one mighty swing, he levels the three of them, reducing them to unconscious piles on the floor.

Rufus puts a hand on his hip, and lurches forward, desperately gasping air. He LAUGHS, despite his exhaustion.

RUFUS

Woo! Still got it!

The Inn keeper pokes his head above the desk, staring in shock. Rufus takes in the decimated Inn, and looks to the Inn Keeper.

RUFUS

Don't think I'll stay tonight.
Probably won't get that deposit
back, will I?

EXT. WALKING PATH - MOMENTS LATER

Rufus pulls his hood over his head as he exits the Inn, back into cruel wind and rain. He walks a ways, and then off the path and into the woods, still sucking air.

EXT. OFF THE BEATEN PATH

Rufus comes upon a huge tree, pulling his shrouds tight around himself, breathing heavily. He stops and then seemingly collapses face first into mud.

He rises back up, and then lowers back down, doing pushups as fast as his arms will let him.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

EXT. SPARRING CIRCLE - DAY

In blazing sun and atop hot sand, Young Rufus stands in a circle of young Nameless. He gazes timidly at their stoic faces, but they pay him no attention.

Across from Rufus stands a smaller OPPONENT of approximately the same age. Thomas hovers over the gathered crowd.

THOMAS

Begin!

Rufus barely manages to deflect a couple swings among the flurry of fists and feet his young opponent hurls. It's not long before Rufus is on his back.

THOMAS

Enough!

Rufus hides behind his arms, and the blows cease. Rufus dusts himself off and climbs to his feet, embarrassed.

THOMAS

Begin!

The opponent rushes and Rufus again goes down after a few shots. And again. And again.

INT. BARRACKS - NIGHT

Beneath an immense tent, dozens of young Nameless sleep peacefully atop cots. Rufus sits in the dirt in a lonely corner with only a lit candle for comfort. He snuffles, looking over each shoulder. He takes a deep breath, and holds a hand over the flame, unwavering.

EXT. TRAINING GROUNDS - DAY

In a long line with a bunch of young Nameless, Rufus does push ups in the dirt to the cadence of Thomas' GRUNTS. It's a struggle for only him.

THOMAS

Up. Down.

Thomas walks up and down the line. He stops atop Rufus, and shoves his boot down atop Rufus' back.

(CONTINUED)

THOMAS

Up. Up!

Rufus fights beneath Thomas' boot to little avail.

INT. BARRACKS - NIGHT

Another sleepy night, save for Rufus, who relentlessly executes push-ups, drenched in sweat.

INT. BARRACKS - DAY

Rufus sits in his corner, watching bitterly as Thomas shaves the head of a young boy with a straight razor. There's a long line of patient faces behind the boy.

INT. BARRACKS - NIGHT

Everyone again fast asleep, Rufus sits in the dirt by candlelight, a bowl of water and mirror in front of him, Thomas' straight razor in hand. He wets his hair and begins clumsily cutting at it.

Soon enough, Rufus' skull is cleanly bald. Without the slightest bit of hesitation, he carves a crude X into the back of his head.

EXT. TRAINING GROUNDS - DAY

The same long line of young Nameless, dutifully following Thomas' cadence. Except for Rufus (older now), who does his push ups as fast as humanly possible.

Thomas comes upon Rufus, annoyed. He sets his boot down upon Rufus' back, but can't slow him. Thomas presses as hard as he can, but Rufus continues, undeterred.

EXT. SPARRING CIRCLE - MONTAGE

Rufus takes down wave after wave of sparring partners, more confident and steadier with each new felled opponent. Thomas watches, amazed.

INT. TENT - NIGHT

A great big canopy. Along its edges, Thomas stands with stoic looking ELDERS, eyes on Rufus. He's made a mountain of himself, and he waits, disciplined but impatient. He stands across from a trio of Nameless: two men and a woman, armed with spears.

The three begin towards him. They're skilled and precise, but Rufus dodges their swings easily, effortless yet annoyed.

THOMAS

Go.

One after the other, Rufus takes on the two men. First, he snaps their spears like twigs. Then he puts them down with big slams, and vicious, pounding fists.

As Rufus finishes off the second man, the woman gets all she can into kicking him in the back, knocking him off. Rufus lifts himself onto his feet, furious. He reaches out at her slowly, and strikes him in the stomach and she smacks his arm away. Irritated, he grabs at her again, and she ducks his arm.

Rufus finally starts swinging at her. She's better than the men, and every move he makes is met with a stinging strike. She works him up into a rage. Along the wall, Thomas leans forward, uneasily.

Rufus takes a step away from the woman, pacing like a big cat, fuming. She hurls a punch at him, and he swings his head into it. Her fist cracks and crumples against his forehead, and he finally gets a hold of her, tackling her to the dirt.

She tries to fight him off, working from beneath him with attempts at strikes and holds. He's too strong. He drops a sharp elbow strike into the side of her head.

THOMAS

That's enough.

The woman keeps up the fight, and Rufus doesn't hesitate to rain more blows upon her. She weakens and her resistance falters, but he doesn't slow, bloodying her up, indifferent.

THOMAS

That's enough!

Rufus stops, climbing off the woman, unmoved. He drags her unconscious body through the dirt, and sets her at the Elders' feet. They regard him, impressed. Thomas looks away, disgusted.

EXT. CAMP FIRE

Rufus (24) sits by a fire with Thomas. With a small stone, he sharpens the blade of Penance. Thomas eyes him carefully.

THOMAS

I didn't want this for you.

Rufus pauses for only a second. He continues sharpening.

THOMAS

I could tell it was doomed.
Nothing's gonna hurt you like
you've been hurt. You're always
going to remember how things were.
Makes all this too painful.

Rufus looks up at the fire.

THOMAS

Everyone else here... this is all
we know. We never had a taste of
any better. Wouldn't know what to
do with it.

Thomas takes a moment.

THOMAS

I want you to leave us.

Rufus finally shoots Thomas a steely glare.

THOMAS

There's a fire in you. Eating its
way out of you. Selfishly, I've fed
it. It's grown into something
magnificent. Something unstoppable.
But I can see now that if we're not
careful... it'll burn this whole
world down.

Rufus sets his sights back on the fire, resolutely sharpening his blade.

RUFUS

Maybe it needs to burn.

END FLASHBACK

INT. GUEST ROOM - MORNING

Elizabeth opens the door to the small guestroom. She finds it seemingly just as she left it: the bed immaculately made, everything in its place. She frowns and begins to close the door.

Suddenly, she notices a pair of wet bootprints beneath the windowsill. She smiles to herself.

EXT. MUDDY ROAD

A horse named HENRY draws a cart through a muddy road amongst looming trees. Atop the cart sits Clyde (70), a wiry, energetic, small old farmer with a tunic and floppy hat. He holds the horse's reins loosely and lazily.

Up the road he notices a ragged Rufus, soaked in mud and shuffling wearily along. Curiously, Clyde comes up next to him.

CLYDE

You look like you've see a thing or two. Long night?

RUFUS

It's the ones still to come I'm worried about.

Clyde GUFFAWS hoarsely. Rufus doesn't even lift his eyes from his path, exhausted but resolved.

CLYDE

Don't see many folks coming through these parts. Bad men never look this tired. Name's Clyde. You got one, stranger?

RUFUS

Nope.

CLYDE

Ooh. How mysterious. I don't believe you. Always liked Mitch. You look like a Mitch. I'll call you Mitch.

Rufus winces slightly as Henry sniffs at him suspiciously. Clyde blathers on.

(CONTINUED)

CLYDE
Mitch, where ya heading?

RUFUS
Down this road.

CLYDE
Ain't that a stitch? Me too! Favor
an old man with some company?

Clyde slides down his bench a little, and pats the spot next to him, enticingly.

RUFUS
Thanks. But really, no.

CLYDE
Oh come on now. Why drag your bones
when Henry here can do it for you?

RUFUS
I don't like horses.

CLYDE
What? What on earth is there not to
like about horses? Man's real best
friend! A dog never carried a man
across countries! Civilizations
were built on the backs of horses!

Henry angrily swings his head into Rufus, knocking him sideways a step. Clyde CLUCKS HIS TONGUE disapprovingly and pulls on the reins. Rufus gives Henry more space.

RUFUS
They don't like me, mainly.

CLYDE
Sorry about that. He's usually
gentle. Come on. I'm getting old,
and I could use a hand with the
chores. There's a meal and a bed at
the end of it for you.

Rufus' stomach grumbles loudly. Clyde LAUGHS heartily.

CLYDE
A man can go without rest or women
if he needs to, but God help you if
you're between a hungry belly and
warm plate.

Rufus and Henry slow to a stop. Reluctantly, Rufus climbs up onto the cart and plops down next to Clyde, setting his spear down.

CLYDE

There you go. Put your feet up.

Clyde whips his reins, but Henry doesn't move.

CLYDE

He does not like you.

Clyde tries again and again. Nothing.

CLYDE

Uhh... would you mind walking?

Rufus SIGHS, and hops off the cart, following along behind.

INT. INN

The Inn Keeper futilely sweeps up wreckage and debris. Crag rubs at a sore neck, and pulls his arm away angrily as one of his lackeys attempts to help him up. The Inn Keeper pauses, sighing dejectedly as he surveys the damage.

A door creaks, and heavy boots clomp along the floor. The Inn Keeper and Crag both look up. Their eyes bulge, and their jaws drop.

Reznick stands in the doorway. From behind his golden mask, he scans the Inn.

REZNICK

What happened here?

The Inn Keeper struggles to get a peep out. Crag shoots to his feet, eagerly.

CRAG

A rebel visited here and incited a conflict. My associates and I questioned him, and when his identity was clear, we attempted to detain him. A citizen's arrest. He blindsided us.

Reznick tilts his head towards Crag, freezing him in place. Crag straightens his posture. Reznick eyes his crude tattoo.

(CONTINUED)

REZNICK
Wipe that blasphemy off.

Crag's hand flies to his shoulder, covering the mark.
Reznick paces the Inn, observing.

CRAG
He was one of The Nameless.

Reznick turns very suddenly towards Crag, attentive.

REZNICK
You know this how?

CRAG
Their mark was engraved on the
shaft of his spear.

Reznick comes within an inch of Crag, looking him up and
down.

CRAG
If you allow us to assist you... we
could surely identify him.

Reznick SNORTS, turning and walking away from Crag.

REZNICK
I've no use for common stock.

Crag chases after Reznick, and grabs him by the shoulder.

CRAG
But my Lord, please!

A blade slides out beneath Reznick's sleeve, and in a flash,
he drives it in and out of Crag's belly.

Crag clutches his stomach, stumbling to the floor. His thugs
rush to his aid. Reznick indifferently wipes his blade on a
handkerchief.

REZNICK
Peasant filth..

Reznick turns to the Inn Keeper.

REZNICK
Which way did he go?

FLASHBACK

EXT. TORCHED TOWN

A gang of Lost, led by Thomas and including a young Rufus, climb a steep hill. On top of it stands a familiar rod: PENANCE, without its blade. It's a mere sign post.

As they reach it, The Nameless's reward is a view into a valley: the remnants of a small town, blanketed in soot and ash. Only the rare pillar or frame remain.

Solemnly, Thomas turns away, descending the way he came. Everyone follows, save for Rufus. He lingers, staring.

Thomas pauses as Rufus grabs hold of the sign post. He shakes his head and begins to turn away as Rufus heaves. The CRACKING and CRUMBLING of dirt as Rufus succeeds wins back his attention.

Rufus leans the sign post, and descends the hill to join his comrades.

END FLASHBACK

INT. SHED

A dark little wooden room with dust floating on the light seeping through a dirty window. Gnarly blades and tools hang on a rack by the wall. Clyde comes through the only door, dragging a disobedient goat by a rope leash. Rufus follows in after him, ducking beneath the low frame.

Clyde pushes the resistant goat into the center of the room, holding him in place with both arms.

CLYDE

Grab one of those blades there.

Rufus looks to the blades on the rack, hesitating.

CLYDE

What's the matter?

RUFUS

Can I... not?

CLYDE

What? Don't like blood?

Rufus looks at him almost apologetically.

(CONTINUED)

CLYDE
Fine. Come hold him.

Rufus pauses, but obliges, bending down and holding the goat in two arms. It thrashes and mewls helplessly as Clyde makes his way to the blades.

CLYDE
What is the world coming to? You
young people don't have a stomach
between you.

Clyde pulls an apron around himself, tying it at the back. Rufus watches him grab a particularly gruesome looking blade. The goat struggles vainly.

CLYDE
Everybody wants meat, no one wants
to see it get made. We're all
carnivores. We all eat to live, one
way or another.

Clyde wipes his blade on his apron. He turns around to find the goat lying limply on the floor, dead. Rufus pets it, soothingly.

EXT. HOUSE - DUSK

Cyril stands guard outside the house, just near the fence. His eyes narrow as he hears something rustling through the wooden path.

INT. KITCHEN

Elizabeth SIGHS tiredly, rolling her neck as she saunters towards the sink. She turns on the water, and begins thoroughly washing her hands and forearms.

Suddenly, she hears voices calling.

ROVER(OS)
Help! Please!

EXT. HOUSE

Cyril long gone, Elizabeth rushes out onto the porch to find Rover and Reaper dragging Crag over their shoulders and through the front gate. She runs down to meet them, looking over Crag: he's pale, soaked in blood, in and out of consciousness.

(CONTINUED)

ELIZABETH
What happened?

ROVER
He's been stabbed.

Bandit hovers politely around them, making concerned noises.

ELIZABETH
Get him into the living room.

Rover and Reaper follow Elizabeth into the house.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Elizabeth begins clearing some space. She pulls some gloves from a pocket, putting them on.

ELIZABETH
I need you to put him up on that table.

Rover and Reaper oblige, setting Crag down as gently as they can. Elizabeth firmly shoves them aside, and begins tearing at Crag's shirt, getting a look at the wound.

ELIZABETH
I need the two of you to go into that cabinet and get me dressings, bandages, needle, and thread.

Rover and Reaper clumsily tear into the cabinet, making a mess of things as Elizabeth puts pressure to the wound with a rag. They look over boxes, frantically and helplessly.

ELIZABETH
Top shelf! In the front.

Rover and Reaper just grab everything they can and drop it at her feet.

ELIZABETH
For shit's sake. Take this.

Rover takes Elizabeth's place holding the rag in place as she sorts through the stuff on the floor. Rover begins wiping up the blood.

ELIZABETH
What are you doing?! Both hands on the wound. Hard!

(CONTINUED)

Crag begins to GROAN, fading. Elizabeth quickly grabs a few things and sets them on the table, and shoves Rover out of the way, trying to get a look at the wound. Crag passes out.

ELIZABETH

Hey!

Elizabeth grabs Crag by the face to no reaction. Rover stares dumbly, and she shoves the rag firmly back onto the wound. She slaps Crag gently on the face with her free hand. Nothing. She checks his pulse.

ELIZABETH

Dammit.

Elizabeth angrily throws down the rag on top of Crag. She rips off her gloves, and hurls them against the wall.

EXT. HOUSE

Cyril stands in the yard unseen, watching Elizabeth through a window. Bandit sits beside him, and groans sadly.

EXT. DARK WOODS - NIGHT

Moody, thick forestry in pitch black night. Along a muddy path walks Reznick. He comes upon a little farm, with a simple home behind a wooden fence, the glimmer of fire the only light emanating from it.

INT. FARM HOUSE

Flames flicker in a fire place, and the furnishings are sturdy and handcrafted. Rufus sits at a cozy dinner table with Clyde, pad of paper and a charcoal pencil in hand.

MARGARETTE, Clyde's wife, gently places a hand atop Clyde's shoulder as she leans over and pours him some wine. He squeezes her hand, and smiles warmly at his wife. Rufus grins to himself. On his pad of paper, he's drawing the two of them.

Something unheard catches Rufus' attention, and his eyes shoot to the door. Clyde looks to him, confused.

EXT. FARM HOUSE

Reznick approaches the front door, and he knocks steadily at it. Clyde opens, and his eyes bulge.

REZNICK

Word has spread that an insurgent has been traveling through the area. A search must be conducted.

CLYDE

Um... yes, of course...

INT. FARM HOUSE

Reznick follows a petrified Clyde into the humble abode. Clyde and his wife retreat into a corner, heads bowed as Reznick strolls about, looking all around. Rufus is nowhere to be seen.

Reznick glances up a staircase, then comes upon a table at the center of the room, and finds a trio of bowls sitting atop it. He looks up to Clyde and Margarett, who can only cower.

REZNICK

The two of you have some company?

Reznick takes a couple menacing steps towards the couple. They say nothing.

REZNICK

Before this goes any further, you should understand what your deaths mean to me. If you are associates to a known fugitive, then I do our kingdom a great service by dispatching you. If you are innocent, then word spreads of my cruelty, and the very notion of aiding the criminal element becomes all the more inconceivable. So, it falls to the two of you to present some value.

The couple can't bring themselves to look up at Reznick as he looms over them. Suddenly, there's a CREAKING at the steps towards the back of the room. Reznick turns.

Down the stairs comes Rufus. He carries his long spear like a walking stick. Reznick straightens.

FLASHBACK

INT. DARNETT'S CHAMBER

A great, massive room fitting a magnificent Prince, with animal hides and masterfully crafted furnishings. Darnett clutches a young Reznick (5) in one arm, lifting heavy blankets off a huge bed with the other. Reznick BAWLS as a battle RAGES loudly outside.

DARNETT

Shush. It's time for bravery, my dear. Strength.

Darnett bends down, and hurries Reznick underneath the bed.

DARNETT

It's time to be quiet. It'll be over soon.

Rufus bursts through the door, Penance at the ready.

END FLASHBACK

INT. FARM HOUSE

Reznick SNORTS, amused. Rufus nods to Clyde and Margarett.

RUFUS

Leave.

REZNICK

Stay.

Neither Clyde nor Margarett budge. Rufus heads towards the table.

REZNICK

I always imagined this with an audience. I'd like someone to see this.

RUFUS

You sure about that?

Rufus sits down, and gestures at the seat across from him. Reznick obliges. Rufus offers him some bread. Reznick refuses with stillness. Rufus shrugs it off, and takes the bread for himself.

REZNICK

Is this where you've been? All this time?

(CONTINUED)

RUFUS
Just passing through.

Reznick GIGGLES, drawing his hand to his mouth.

REZNICK
What fortune!

RUFUS
Not as I see it.

REZNICK
No, I wouldn't think.

Reznick leans forward, giddily.

REZNICK
You know... I wondered why you had spared me. It took a while for the brilliant spite of it to reveal itself. You knew what my life would be. That my very existence would be a reminder of the stain my father's failure brought upon our house. That I would be shunned, thought lame and tainted for the blood we shared.

Rufus winces only slightly, pitying. He pours two cups of tea.

REZNICK
He was no warrior. It's no great achievement killing a weak, meek man. Your name. 'God killer'. It's a lie.

Rufus firmly sets a cup of tea in front of Reznick, then leans back in his chair.

RUFUS
You're right.

Reznick tilts his head at the tea, surprised.

RUFUS
Your father wasn't as hard as your uncle. As your grandfather. As I was. He was vulnerable. Gentle. Kind.

Rufus sets down his spear.

RUFUS
Don't hate him for it.

Reznick plays with his cup of tea, uneasily.

REZNICK
(to Clyde and Margarete)
Leave.

Dutifully, Clyde and Margarete scurry out. Reznick SIGHS, dejected.

REZNICK
Look at you. Begging and bargaining. I thought... I hoped I'd meet the best of you. All the fury those legends promised. Not like this. There's no glory in this.

Reznick turns and hides his head. He tilts up his mask slightly and takes a sip of his tea. Rufus leans forward, hopefully.

RUFUS
This path you're on... You can still change it. Look at me. Ragged. Old. Kill me. What'll it mean?

REZNICK
Nothing.

Reznick down his drink. He shakes his head.

REZNICK
Meaning... that comes later, doesn't it? Stories get embellished, motives and facts twisted and lionized. An assassin becomes the slayer of a dragon. A room in a house becomes a battlefield doused in blood. Butchering a couple of farmers and a mangy wanderer become the defining triumph of a dynasty.

Rufus' face sags.

REZNICK
Facts fade. Stories linger.

Rufus stares at Reznick, sadly. Reluctantly, he grabs his spear.

(CONTINUED)

RUFUS

You'll know.

REZNICK

But they won't.

Reznick whips his chains down through the table, slicing it in two. Rufus calmly shoots out of his chair, backpedaling, lifting up his spear.

FLASHBACK

INT. DARNETT'S CHAMBER

Darnett, dwarfed by Rufus, rolls towards a raging fire in a huge hearth as Rufus swings. With a flourish of his hands, Darnett launches a line of fire at Rufus.

Rufus bulldozes right through the fire as he presses after Darnett, swinging relentlessly but expertly. Darnett tries to fight from out of his range, constantly attempting to make distance, but Rufus always quickly closes.

The fire never deters Rufus. Whether he goes around it or through it, he never lets it keep him from coming forward. Whenever he catches alight, he smothers it quickly or even ignores it completely.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. FARM HOUSE

Rufus hurtles out a window, knocked backwards. Reznick leaps out after him, and Rufus is to his feet to meet him. Rufus backpedals into the woods, deflecting swipes but unable to return any.

Reznick swings from branches via his chains and attacks Rufus from above. Rufus never uses his spear as anything but a shield. He tries to fit punches and kicks into small openings, but Cyril eludes him.

Reznick finally begins to accumulate landed blows, kicking, scratching, clawing. Rufus, with his scrapes and cuts adding up, picks up his game. He muscles Reznick away and swings Penance, just missing but smashing wood and earth.

FLASHBACK

INT. DARNETT'S CHAMBER

The pace proves too much for Darnett. Rufus drives his spear into his chest. Darnett GASPS, clutching at the weapon, trying to push out, but Rufus is far too strong. Rufus lifts him into the air, then pins him atop the bed, driving the blade deeper.

Young Reznick gasps as he sees a blade plunge through the mattress above him.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. FARM HOUSE

Reznick, retreating, hurls both chains at Rufus. Rufus twists his spear, trapping the chains and pulling Reznick towards him. Rufus drives the butt of his spear into the ground, and rains punches into Reznick's face, knocking him to his knees, denting his mask.

When a hunk of the base of Reznick's mask flies off, Rufus pulls back, shaking out his hand.

We get our first clear look at the base of Reznick's chains: they grow from orifices on his forearms, an extension of his very being.

As Rufus reaches a tender hand towards him, Reznick spits in his face.

Furious, Rufus kicks into Reznick's chest, launching him backwards. The force knocks his mask off and snaps the chains from his forearms, and Reznick HOWLS in agony as he hits the dirt. Rufus grimaces, immediately regretful.

FLASHBACK

INT. DARNETT'S CHAMBER

Rufus stands atop the bed, glaring callously at a GARGLING Darnett. Rufus tears his mask off, and what he finds couldn't shock him more.

Darnett's face is as average as it gets: thin, kind, and modest. He looks at Rufus with enormous, terrified eyes as he GULPS for air. Rufus just scans his face, at a loss.

Darnett's death comes without glamour. Rufus pulls out his spear, and there's finally enough silence for him to hear heavy breathing.

(CONTINUED)

Rufus hurls himself off the bed and shoots an arm beneath it. He pulls out the young Reznick. He SCREAMS as Rufus towers over him. He's tiny, even for his age. He cowers, infantile, hiding behind his arms.

Rufus holds the blade of his spear at Reznick's throat. He maneuvers it past Reznick's arms, and turns the boy's face up towards him. It's soft, almost sickly. Reznick opens wet eyes.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. FRAM HOUSE

Reznick rises to his knees, back turned, humiliated.

REZNICK
It's not fair... It's not right...

Rufus approaches slowly, cautiously.

REZNICK
Everything I've done I did to build myself for this. And still you take from me. Like I'm nothing!

Rufus comes upon him. Reznick suddenly seems so small and frail. His hair hangs over his boyish, bloodied face. All that's left of his chains are nasty, fractured bone poking out from his arms.

REZNICK
It isn't right. What more could I have done? What was left for me to give? What's left for me now?

Reznick looks to the night sky, heartbroken.

REZNICK
Be done with it. Kill me.

Rufus shakes his head.

REZNICK
How can you still be so hateful?

RUFUS
Run. Go anywhere. Find something. You're not your family. You're not what anyone says you are. You can be different. You can choose.

(CONTINUED)

Reznick looks up at Rufus, pleadingly. With the jagged shard upon his wrist, he opens his throat.

Rufus rushes to Reznick's aid as he falls backwards. Rufus desperately clutches at his throat, trying to stop the bleeding. He tears at his own shrouds, trying to free some cloth.

Timidly, Clyde approaches the scene, stopping at a distant. He watches Rufus scramble, horrified.

Soaked in blood, Rufus lifts Reznick's head and quickly whips the cloth around Reznick's neck for a makeshift tourniquet. Rufus presses down against the seeping wound, but it's for nothing. Reznick dies in his arms.

FLASHBACK

INT. DARNETT'S CHAMBER

Rufus hears FOOTSTEPS racing up stairs outside the door. Reznick turns his face away, fighting down sobs. Rufus looks him over, confused. He just walks away.

EXT. CAMP - LATER

Rufus brushes aside the flap of a tent entrance. A few dozen Nameless shoot to their feet when they spot him. He looks over their awestruck expressions.

Thomas slides past Rufus, then turns back towards him. He kneels and bows his head. The Nameless all follow suit.

Rufus shuffles uncomfortably.

RUFUS

Get up.

EXT. CAMP - LATER

Rufus sits in front of a massive fire, staring into it quietly as The Nameless party rowdily around him. Darnett's mask sits on a pyke.

Thomas, arm slung around a young apprentice, raises a drink to Rufus.

(CONTINUED)

THOMAS

The believers say The Gods cover
their faces to spare us. That our
feeble minds can't bear their
beauty. We of The Nameless have
never been so gullible. But now
we've got someone who knows!

Thomas gets some CHEERS.

THOMAS

Tell us, Rufus! How ugly was he?
Warts? Puss? Sharp teeth and boils?
Come on now, how'd he look?!

Fire lights Rufus' vacant face.

RUFUS

Scared.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. DARK RIVER

Grim clouds and murky water. Rufus walks along the stony shore, Reznick slung over his shoulder and dragging a wooden raft behind him. He comes to a spot where the water fades into the horizon, and stops. He sets down the raft, and then Reznick on top of it.

EXT. BRIGHT RIVER - DUSK

Green grass and a colourful sunset. Elizabeth sits on sand by still waters. Crag rests on a raft beside her. Ritualistically, she begins pulling off his boots.

INTERCUT BRIGHT RIVER AND DARK RIVER

Rufus strains to pull off Reznick elaborate tunic, and tosses it aside. Elizabeth gently slides Crag out of his coat, folds it, and sets it down nicely.

Rufus cringes, and looks to the sky as he begins pulling off Reznick's pants. Elizabeth folds Crag's hands over his chest. He's already naked.

Rufus wanders through prickly shrubbery, snatching whatever flora and fragments of beauty he can find. Elizabeth meticulously sets down beautifully coloured petals, and branches around and atop Crag.

(CONTINUED)

Rufus kneels over the naked Reznick. It's a humble tribute, with scarce green and fanfare. Rufus looks over Reznick's snaking tattoo, then places his palm over Reznick's forehead, and mutters a silent prayer.

Elizabeth follows suit, Rover and Reaper hovering behind her. She finishes, and the three of them together gently slide Crag into the still water.

Rufus has to shove firmly to get Reznick through the stone and into the tide, knee deep in the muck and the mire. He watches waves carry Reznick into haze. Rufus exhales heavily, and sets back on his way.

END INTERCUT

EXT. BRIGHT RIVER

Elizabeth, Rover, and Reaper watch Crag float serenely into the falling sun. Sadly yet peacefully, Rover and Reaper turn away, walking down the beach. Elizabeth stays, watching the raft, alone.

Cyril emerges from the woods behind her. He begins, something like comforting:

CYRIL
You shouldn't grieve.

Elizabeth doesn't take her eyes off the water.

ELIZABETH
Didn't hear you. Been practicing that?

CYRIL
He was a loyalist. The loss of an enemy is a victory for us.

ELIZABETH
He wasn't my enemy.

Cyril bristles. He folds his arms.

CYRIL
All this... it's empty ritual. Superstition. It doesn't mean anything. They're not worth it.

Crag finally disappears into the horizon.

(CONTINUED)

ELIZABETH
We're all worth it.

Elizabeth turns and leaves, walking right past Cyril. He frowns, considering.

EXT. OUTPOST

Soldiers huddle in front of a shack on a muddy road, chatting amongst themselves. Behind them, Clyde shuffles slowly towards them, face gaunt and anxious. In his hands, he holds out Reznick's mask.

The soldiers finally spot Clyde. They raise their weapons, and rush towards him.

INT. THRONE ROOM

Mathius sits in his throne, fingers anxiously tapping the arm. Soldiers rush into the throne room, one of them carrying something beneath a cloth.

Mathius shoots to his feet to meet the men. He rips off the cloth, and finds Reznick's mask in the soldier's hands. He stares at it silently, frozen.

Mathius nods his head and turns away. The soldiers daintily set the mask down upon the floor, then scurry out of the room as Mathius solemnly drifts up back towards the throne, staring at the painting of he and Reznick.

Mathius bows his head. The painting flies off the wall, smashing on the floor.

INT. THRONE ROOM - DAY

A pair of guards drag a petrified Clyde, and toss him into the lonely centre of the room. Guards litter the walls. Mathius sits above him in his throne, looming. Clyde trembles beneath his steady gaze and silence.

MATHIUS
Tell me everything.

Clyde maneuvers himself onto his knees, pleading.

CLYDE
I found a man, on the road. He was filthy, tired. I had no idea who he was. How could I? Then the Prince came to our door. He was...

(CONTINUED)

Mathius grips the arms of his chair, impatiently.

CLYDE

Investigating. The man hid.

MATHIUS

You hid him.

CLYDE

No! We didn't know who he was, we didn't know who was at the door! We opened our hearts! What could we do?! They tore our house to pieces. The moment we could serve you, we did! I came to your men!

Mathius stands and Clyde throws his head down to the floor, bowing.

MATHIUS

Tell me about my nephew.

CLYDE

What?

MATHIUS

The Prince. His last moments. Did you see the fight? The fall?

Clyde can't manage words. Mathius descends the steps, approaching. His clenched fists tremble, furiously. Clyde merely cowers. Mathius takes a breath, relaxing.

MATHIUS

Was it painful?

Clyde raises his eyes up to Mathius.

CLYDE

I'm sorry.

Mathius nods. He reaches out a hand. Clyde flinches, but Mathius merely places a tender hand on his shoulder.

MATHIUS

How could you have known? Hunter could be... troubled. Intimidate and impose when unnecessary. I hoped I'd break him of it. Show him the way. You showed virtues he lacked. Mercy. Pity. Thank you.

Mathius addresses the guards.

MATHIUS

Take him away.

Mathius turns away. Guards dutifully help Clyde up and escort him away.

MATHIUS

Fix up his house.

INT. BEDROOM

Elizabeth steps into her bedroom, exhausted. She pulls the door shut behind her, but it pops back open a crack. She sits down on her bed, and begins pulling off her boots.

INT. SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY

Silently, Cyril climbs the stairs, regret on his face. He takes a breath, gathers his courage and takes a step towards the bedroom.

Cyril freezes as he sees Elizabeth pull off her coat through the crack in the door. Embarrassed, he turns away. But he pauses. Careful not to be seen, he peeps again through the crack.

Cyril GULPS as Elizabeth begins unbuttoning her sweater. She slides it off, her dress revealing bare shoulders and back. But something else as well: an unmistakable, unique, snaking tattoo. The Royal Sigel.

Cyril's eyes almost pop out of his head. Furiously, he kicks the door in.

INT. BEDROOM

Elizabeth shoots to her feet, startled. Cyril draws his sword, and swings wildly at her. She reveals skill, dodging his swipes by inches.

She rolls over her bed, trying to get some distance. He leaps at her, and she pulls him through the air, smashing his face into the wall. She kicks him in the chest, knocking him down and into a chair.

She grabs a candelabra off the bedside table as Cyril rises. He swings down at her with his sword, but she catches it between two columns of her makeshift weapon. She disarms him, and kicks him across the face.

(CONTINUED)

Cyril quickly gathers himself, but hand to hand, he's no match for her. She blocks or dodges all his strikes, and punishes every move. He makes one last swing at her, and she plants a fist right beneath his chin.

Cyril collapses on her bed, unconscious. Elizabeth surveys her demolished bedroom with irritation.

ELIZABETH

Shit.

INT. SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Elizabeth struggles to drag the unconscious Cyril by the feet. He's heavy, and she can only manage it in fits and spurts.

INT. GUEST BEDROOM - LATER

Cyril wakes with a start. He finds himself lying on the bed, his legs and good arm tied to the corner posts of the frame. Elizabeth sits in a chair just off the side of the bed, watching over him. He fights and pulls futilely.

ELIZABETH

Would you calm down? You're making too big a deal of this.

Grudgingly, Cyril settles. Elizabeth sighs:

CYRIL

You're the Princess.

ELIZABETH

Yeah, that's part of it -

CYRIL

Rufus is a traitor.

Elizabeth takes exception.

ELIZABETH

You don't know what you think you know.

FLASHBACK MONTAGE

INT. ROYAL CHAMBER - NIGHT

Majestic, ancient splendor. Torches and candles illuminate stone and stained glass. At the foot of an enormous four post bed, a DOCTOR sits between the QUEEN'S knees. She MOANS and GROANS, in labor, invisible amongst drapes and curtains

ELIZABETH(VO)

From the moment I came into this world, I was a disappointment.

An ominous figure looms over the Doctor, only visible beneath the neck: the KING. Every inch of him is covered in exquisitely designed robe. He places a gloved hand atop the Doctor's shoulder.

The QUEEN screams. The Doctor proudly raises a beautiful BABY GIRL towards the King, who doesn't budge. The Doctor instead hands the girl to the unseen Queen.

ELIZABETH(VO)

No King wants a daughter.

The sound of a knife, SLICING. The King strides away, arms folded behind his back. The Doctor collapses to the floor, dead. It's Rufus' Father.

EXT. COURTYARD

In a big open space among tall walls, three children in robes and masks stand rigidly. Across from them, obscured in shadow beneath an awning, the King sits.

ELIZABETH(VO)

I was always behind my brothers. In age, skill, and promise.

The King gestures, and the middle child, Prince Darnett, begins an expert martial arts pattern. It's artful, elegant. Fire dances along with him. The King gestures firmly to stop, and Darnett bows.

The King points to the oldest and biggest child, Prince Mathius. He steps forward to a spot where swords, knives, and other bladed weapons sit. They tremble and rise up from the ground, floating. Prince Mathius begins his pattern, fierce, the blades hacking and slicing all around him.

The King gestures to stop. Prince Mathius bows proudly, and returns to his spot.

(CONTINUED)

ELIZABETH(VO)
My abilities were late to develop.

The young Princess Elizabeth, in a hornless golden mask, shyly steps forward. She begins her martial arts pattern. It's dainty, unrefined, and without accoutrement. The King gets up and walks away.

EXT. MARKETPLACE

Royal Guards carry a carriage on their shoulders through a destitute shanty-town. Through a mesh curtain, Elizabeth, now 15, looks upon poor and desperate children. Her mask now sports her tiny upturned horns.

ELIZABETH(VO)
At least, that's how it seemed. I
could see things. Into people.

A MOTHER holds a limp pale child in her hands, WAILING desperately for aid. She rushes towards the carriage, but a guard firmly shoves her aside.

Elizabeth considers as the carriage continues down the road. She slips out the side door, and scurries towards the Mother. The guards chase after her, snatching her up before she gets too far.

END FLASHBACK

INT. GUEST BEDROOM

Elizabeth sits leaning forward in her chair, lost in thought.

ELIZABETH
It helps me help people. Usually.

Cyril watches her, still steaming.

ELIZABETH
When you know what people think,
people feel, you see how alike
everyone really is.

FLASHBACK MONTAGE

INT. ROYAL TOMB

An expansive room, with stone floor disappearing into endless shadow. Elizabeth, Mathius, and their parents hover around a mantle, upon which rests a figure beneath a tarp.

With a nervous hand, the King pulls on the tarp, revealing Prince Darnett. The King GASPS, just barely audible. Elizabeth watches him, his hand trembling at his side. Gently, kindly, she squeezes it.

ELIZABETH(VO)

Everybody gets scared. Everybody has shame, doubts. Everybody hurts. From the lowest street rat all the way up to my Father.

The King rips his hand free and storms off.

INT. PRINCESS ELIZABETH'S BEDROOM

A windowless room. Princess Elizabeth sits back turned on a meager single bed. A door slams shut, sealing her in.

ELIZABETH(VO)

He hated me for it. They all did.

INT. PRINCESS ELIZABETH'S BEDROOM

Mathius plays a little board game with Elizabeth. She hovers over it, utterly enraptured. He sits with back straight.

ELIZABETH(VO)

Almost.

EXT. FIELDS - NIGHT

Vicious dogs snap and bark among tall grass, on leashes held by guards. Prince Mathius stands among the head of the pack.

ELIZABETH(VO)

I fled the first chance I got.

INT. CASTLE RUINS - CONTINUOUS

Elizabeth peeks through a crack among wreckage of a once great stone structure. She sees the hunting party, and then stealthily ducks, moving along.

ELIZABETH(VO)

That's when I first met him.

Rufus bursts from the shadows, swinging his spear. Elizabeth just barely evades.

ELIZABETH(VO)

He was everything they said. He was... primal. Ancient. Unstoppable. I've never seen anything like it, before or since.

Elizabeth tries to fight, but it's useless. Her blows bounce off him, ineffectual. Eventually, the blunt end of his spear knocks her across the head, sending her mask flying, snapping in two.

Rufus descends upon Elizabeth. He grabs her jaw in one hand, and she stares up at him, petrified, lip bloodied.

END FLASHBACK

INT. GUEST BEDROOM

Elizabeth leans towards Cyril, looking over him.

ELIZABETH

The thing about you Lost... I can't read you. You've hacked away at all that's soft in you. Whatever's left, you bury so deep no one knows it's there. Not even you. But with Rufus that night... anyone could have known what he felt. It was in the air. Hot. White. Hate so complete I couldn't fathom it. He held my life in his hand.

FLASHBACK

INT. CASTLE RUINS

Rufus squeezes Elizabeth's trembling jaw in his hand, hesitating.

ELIZABETH(VO)
Somehow, in that moment, he saw
what I always saw. Gods and
insects, we're all the same.

Rufus leans down towards Elizabeth, softening.

RUFUS
Disappear.

Rufus rises off of Elizabeth, grabs half her shattered mask, and sprints out of there. Elizabeth takes huge, relieved gasps of air, and flees in the opposite direction.

The moment the scene has emptied, Prince Mathius and his hunting party arrive upon it. He finds the remaining shattered half of Elizabeth's mask. He bends down and turns it over with a quivering hand. Specks of blood cover it.

END FLASHBACK

INT. GUEST BEDROOM

Cyril turns his face away from Elizabeth, disgusted.

ELIZABETH
He's not who you think. I'm not who
you think. Any story is an
incomplete story.

Elizabeth gets up, leaving Cyril to stew.

EXT. VALLEY

Rufus shuffles along through lonely fields. He focuses on a scrap of paper, drawing with a tiny pencil the frame of Elizabeth's face.

FANTASY SEQUENCE

Rufus imagines Elizabeth walking alongside him. She pokes her head over his shoulder, peeking at his drawing.

ELIZABETH

You always draw me too pretty, you liar. My face is fatter than that.

RUFUS

No it isn't.

ELIZABETH

I know my own face.

RUFUS

Not like I do.

Elizabeth looks up from the drawing and at their surroundings.

ELIZABETH

I'm not this nice, either. You know how pissed at you I must be, right?

RUFUS

Yeah...

ELIZABETH

It's only going to get worse. Come home.

RUFUS

I'd like to.

ELIZABETH

You're not getting anywhere. All this... no good's going to come from it. Come home. You can still fix things. But the longer this goes... the harder it'll get.

Rufus hears the BUZZING of flies. He looks up from his paper.

On the thickest branch of a tall tree, three brothers of The Nameless are strung up, flayed, desecrated, and long dead. On the trunk of the tree, a sign with the trademark Nameless 'X' emblazoned across it reads "A Warning To All Lost Souls."

Rufus quietly stares up at the gruesome scene, heartbroken yet unflinching. Elizabeth pulls at him, but he doesn't waver.

(CONTINUED)

ELIZABETH

Come home. You can't help them.
Don't let them pull you down with
them. Come home. Please?

RUFUS

I can't. Not yet.

END FANTARY SEQUENCE

Elizabeth is gone. Rufus tucks away his scrap of paper, and walks with his spear.

INT. GUEST BEDROOM

Elizabeth steals a glance into the room from the hall. Cyril is gone.

EXT. WOODS

Cyril stomps through the woods, weighed down by every one of his earthly possessions. He struggles with the strap of his bag, trying to carry all he has in one arm.

Fuming, he stops by the base of a tall tree, dropping everything to the dirt. He pulls his wounded arm out from its sling. He carefully begins unwrapping its bandages. His skin is pristine, fully healed. He clenches and unclenches his fist, without incident.

A SCUFFLE catches his ear. He peers around the tree, and sees a gang of PEASANTS wrestling and fighting with some SOLDIERS.

A TALL SOLDIER fights off one of the peasants, hurling him to the dirt. The Tall Soldier begins to draw his sword when an arrow shoots in from some unseen corner, piercing his throat. As he gurgles and staggers to the dirt, a peasant pats him down, finding a small purse. The peasants all flee with whatever loot they can gather.

A short, BOYISH SOLDIER spins around, searching the surrounding woods, sword shaking in his hand. An arrow blindsides him in the leg, just below some armor. The Soldier SCREAMS, stumbling to the dirt.

The Boyish Soldier claws to his feet and tries to make a break for it, but another arrow plunges into his back. He YELPS, collapsing.

(CONTINUED)

Cyril emerges from his high ground, stalking towards the soldier and securing the bow back against his shoulders. Cyril draws a knife as he comes upon his prey. He turns the soldier onto his back, and sits down on his chest.

The Boyish Soldier looks up with wet, terrified eyes as Cyril pulls back his knife. The Boyish Soldier clenches his eyes shut, WHIMPERING. Cyril pauses.

FLASHBACK

EXT. CAMP - NIGHT

A lonely night, with scattered Nameless asleep in darkness. Rufus sits by the dwindling embers of a campfire. He stares at Elizabeth's shattered mask, which sits atop a pyke.

Rufus stands to his feet, picking Penance up off the ground. He begins into the darkness. Thomas stirs, rolling over and noticing Rufus walking away.

THOMAS

You've always had so much pain.

Rufus pauses. He doesn't turn to meet his gaze.

THOMAS

I'm glad you're ready to stop adding to it.

Rufus disappears into the darkness. Thomas smiles.

END FLASHBACK

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

Elizabeth sits in her living room, drink in one hand and her head in the other. She shoots to her feet when she hears her door swing open.

She finds Cyril standing in the doorway, dragging the Boyish Soldier.

CYRIL

He's hurt.

Elizabeth only needs a moment to gather herself.

(CONTINUED)

ELIZABETH

Get him on the table.

Cyril takes his order quickly, setting the soldier down as gently as he can manage. Elizabeth stands over her bleeding patient, frantic. She presses one hand against a wound, and stretches for a tool upon a side table. It's just out of a reach.

A hand snatches it up, passing it to her. Elizabeth looks up, surprised to find Cyril. He strides past her, to the other side of the makeshift operating table. Elizabeth just stares at him, in shock.

CYRIL

What can I do?

Elizabeth shakes from her stupor.

ELIZABETH

Put your hands right here.

Cyril obliges, and Elizabeth sets back to work.

INT. MATHIUS' QUARTERS

By candle light in a small room, Mathius paints a fine portrait of he and his fallen family: Elizabeth, Reznick, and Darnett all join him.

EXT. ROYAL PRISON - NIGHT

ELITE GUARDS in gaudy apparel march along high stone walls and walkways. Rufus emerges from the murky waters of the moat. He scales the outer wall, brick by brick. He pauses as a guard strolls by overhead, then sneaks over the top behind him.

Rufus comes down atop the roof of a building. He pauses, surveying his surroundings. He see guards below him, and a clear (yet long) jump towards another roof.

Something way across the courtyard catches his eye through

Rufus pauses, watching Mathius through the distant window. He thumbs his bow, considering for a moment. Instead, he continues along his way, building momentum for a leap over the chasm between the roofs.

(CONTINUED)

He clumsily falls short, arms scrapping desperately at the ledge, a guard obliviously standing watch just below him. As Rufus fumbles for a grip, his spear slips off from his back. He just barely manages to reach down and grab it with one hand just before it lands right atop the guard.

Rufus does his best not to scream as the tremendous weight of the spear rips at his shoulder socket, its point dangling precariously over the guard's head. The sheath begins to slip from the blade, and Rufus can do nothing but watch in a panic.

The guard, bored, continues along his way just as the sheath hits the ground where he stood. After he rounds the corner, Rufus breathes a sigh of relief, and with great difficulty, he swings himself and his spear over the ledge.

Rufus drops down into an alleyway just as another guard disappears around a corner. Rufus quickly consults his map as he approaches a door with racks of weapons on either side of it. He pulls the door open, and finds Mathius standing behind it, staring a hole right through him.

Rufus hurriedly slams the door shut, but it flies off its hinges, smacking him to the ground before splintering into countless pieces. He quickly rolls to his feet as Guards rush into the area, blocking his only exit. They throw down their arms upon him, and he slips around their strikes, dealing blows with the blunt end of his spear.

Steel RATTLES as Mathius lifts weapons out from the racks and into the air with the force of his mind. Mathius flairs his hands at his sides, and LEVITATES. He jets towards Rufus, a trio of swords hovering ahead of him.

Rufus knocks down the guards surrounding him and tries to fend off Mathius' flurry of blades. He blocks and ducks, but the pace is overwhelming. He manufactures some distance, and hurls down a smokebomb.

The guards thrash in the haze, but Mathius stares knowingly at the open door.

INT. ROYAL PRISON

Rufus sprints through damp stony halls by torchlight, past empty cell after empty cell. Finally, at the end of a long hall, he spots Thomas. He's seated on his knees with his head hanging forward, chained to the floor and behind iron bars.

(CONTINUED)

Rufus smiles, elated. He rushes over and smashes in the lock with the butt of his spear. He slices through Thomas' chains, than gently shakes him by the shoulder.

RUFUS

Tom! Tom, let's go!

Thomas slowly climbs to his feet, and kicks Rufus hard in the chest, knocking him to the floor.

Rufus rolls to his feet as Thomas strides towards him.

RUFUS

What are you doing?

Thomas swings at Rufus, who slips his strikes easily. Rufus tries again and again to grab hold and hinder Thomas, but Thomas keeps breaking his grip.

Around them, along the walls and walkways, Guards emerge, watchful. Mathius joins the spectators just as Rufus again gets knocked to the ground.

MATHIUS

All men share a single destiny: to
be broken.

The Elite Guards remove their masks and helmets, revealing countless bald heads and scarred over X's, each and everyone of them men and women of The Nameless. Rufus desperately searches the countless vacant stares as they draw their weapons and descend upon him.

Mathius circles along the edge of the space as Rufus dodges slices, deflecting blows with his spear, trying to keep from hurting his attackers. He drives the sharp end of his spear into a discarded helmet, and uses it to rain down blunted strikes.

From the distant wall and with just a flick of his hand, Mathius rips a torch off a wall and shoots it at Rufus. It blindsides him, knocking him down. He rolls off the embers, but the lapse is enough to strain his pace.

Rufus fights harder, and more recklessly, protecting his brothers less and less. From his safe distance, Mathius launches anything he can get a hold of: prison bars, abandoned weapons, etc.

Rufus dodges most of it, but the helmet lodged upon the blade of Penance finally splits in half as it crashes upon a chest. Frustrated, Rufus flings his spear at Mathius. Mathius just barely sidesteps it, and it stabs into the wall behind him.

(CONTINUED)

Mathius eyes the spear. He gestures mildly with his hand and it barely rattles. He digs his feet down, and strains mightily.

Rufus spots Mathius' struggle, and tries to fight his way through the densely packed crowd. Mathius finally manages to make the spear shake, and with great strain he pulls the spear free with his mind. It floats in the air, and he points it towards Rufus.

Rufus closes the remaining distance. He kicks the spear in midair, flipping the sharp end towards Mathius. He hold the blade at Mathius' throat, exhausted yet relieved. Every guard takes pause.

RUFUS

Let them go.

Mathius stares through Rufus, at his mercy.

MATHIUS

You shouldn't have waited.

The army of guards behind Rufus all drop to their knees, and settle their swords upon their chests. Rufus searches their empty gazes, horrified.

Thomas grabs a knife off the ground and follows suit. But he begins to press with the blade. Slowly, he draws blood.

RUFUS

Stop...

Rufus lowers his spear. The guards all drop their weapons. Grudgingly, Rufus drives the butt of his spear into the floor. It stand in cracked stone like a monument as the guards all descend upon him.

INT. HOLDING QUARTERS - LATER

Elite Guards stand around a table by a fireplace in a small room. They tear through Rufus' pack, sorting and filing things into baskets as they race along. They come upon his sketches, and indifferently stuff them away.

INT. DUNGEON CELL

A dark and dank place, with only the faintest light jutting in from a tiny barred window. In the center of the room, Rufus stands, feet shackled to the floor and arms chained to the ceiling, suspended.

(CONTINUED)

Thomas lifts a bowl of gruel to Rufus' lips, and he absorbs it sloppily.

RUFUS

How's the escape plan coming? Ready to bust me out?

Thomas' blank gaze doesn't falter. He strolls to a corner of the room.

Iron strains as a pair of Elite Guards open the door for Mathius, escorting him in. Mathius approaches, stopping at a safe distance. Rufus offers no acknowledgement.

MATHIUS

Where have you been? Hiding in plain sight? Cultivating your legend?

Rufus looks up at Mathius.

RUFUS

Enjoying retirement.

Mathius just looks at Rufus for a moment, in silent bewilderment. He CHUCKLES, shaking his head.

MATHIUS

Never took the Nameless for the sort. I suppose if anyone earned it...

Mathius steadies his gaze on Rufus. Rufus averts his.

MATHIUS

I've always wondered... where are you from? What rare confluence of cruelty spewed you out? How much pain could it possibly take to make something so wretched? How could it match the wounds you've given me?

Rufus finally looks at Mathius.

MATHIUS

I know hate to be a poison. I've seen it twist and ruin better men than you. It's a low, hideous thing. But somehow... with your vile, putrid spite... you've wiped away that which I cherish most. My purest, most perfect loves. You should be an impossibility. You're

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MATHIUS (cont'd)
 a miraculous abomination. I've
 spent years trying to purge you
 from my mind. I've tried so long to
 forgive you. But you persist.

Mathius turns away, calming himself.

MATHIUS
 I won't hate you. Or your brothers.
 I promise you this. I want to save
 you. All of you. Let me. In
 your hands now is the opportunity
 to end a war.

Rufus listens, uneasily. He looks at the vacant gazes of the
 guards.

MATHIUS
 There are more of you. Not many.
 But enough to spread. Draw more in.
 It's time for this to end. Look at
 your brothers. Look at the agony
 I've spared them. They ache for
 nothing. They don't covet, or
 hunger, or hate. Before all things,
 all people seek purpose. Your
 brothers have been gifted it.

RUFUS
 These men are less than slaves.

MATHIUS
 Service is honourable. Service is
 selfless. All good men serve.

Rufus stares at a statuesque Thomas.

RUFUS
 Who do you serve?

MATHIUS
 I serve a nation of masters. I've a
 duty to every soul in this kingdom.
 Their peace and prosperity is my
 obligation. As it should be your's.
 The righteous man thinks of others
 before himself. If you love your
 brothers, present and
 future, spare them the misery. You
 know. They'll torture and butcher
 each other endlessly. For what? For
 some juvenile, self-defeating
 crusade?

Rufus listens, horrified yet resolved.

RUFUS
Would you really have hurt them?

Mathius pauses.

MATHIUS
I don't know.

Rufus lowers his head, clamming up. Mathius SIGHS, and heads for the door, Thomas and the guards following him.

MATHIUS
You're not so special. The others
succumbed. You will too. Until
then... we'll make use of you.
Steel sharpens steel.

Rufus closes his eyes, steeling himself.

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

MONTAGE

EXT. PORCH - DUSK

Elizabeth stands on the porch, clutching a shawl around her. She looks out at the path towards town, impatiently.

CYRIL(VO)
Months passed. And then a year.

Angrily, Elizabeth turns away, stomping back into her house.

INT. HOUSE

Elizabeth goes through shelves and cabinets, dumping knick knacks and other items into a box.

CYRIL(VO)
Once a week, she would gather a box
of his things to throw out.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Elizabeth sets down a full box by the side of the road, just outside the gate. She wipes her hands on her coat, and heads back for the house.

CYRIL(VO)

She did it defiantly. Like it was some slight against him.

Cyril stands on the porch. She strides right past him, into the house.

CYRIL(VO)

But Rufus didn't keep much. She could have rid herself of it all in a day if she wanted.

EXT. HOUSE - LATER

Elizabeth stands on the porch, staring out across the yard at the shed.

CYRIL(VO)

Eventually, the house was empty. All that was left was his shed. His private space.

Elizabeth slides a key into the lock on the shed doors, and pulls off the chains.

INT. RUFUS' SHED - MOMENTS LATER

Elizabeth speeds through the clean-up, shoving dusty tools and trinkets into a box. She upends a crate on the table, and uncovers a book. She pauses, looking over the cover: TO BE A GOOD MASTER, A GUIDE TO DOG OWNERSHIP.

Cyril slowly enters through the open shed door as Elizabeth sits down upon a stool. She begins rifling through the book. Every page is marred by hand made notes in the margins and circles around key phrases. There's barely any white room left.

Elizabeth's face flushes as a shaking hand flips through the pages. The notes and circles continue from beginning to end. Her face red and eyes wet, she slams the book shut and tosses it aside.

(CONTINUED)

ELIZABETH
That asshole dog!

Elizabeth presses her mouth into her fist, looking out the window, furious.

ELIZABETH
He said it would hate him! It snapped at him the moment we found him! I told him he'd win it over. How could he not? The dog was insane! It was uncanny! He was the gentlest I'd ever seen, and that bastard mutt didn't give him an ounce of kindness back. He never gave up. Because I loved it.

Cyril folds his arms and looks to the floor. A sob escapes Elizabeth. She fights it, but eventually, her face finds her hands, and she weeps.

ELIZABETH
He's gone. He did everything right, everything he could, and it didn't matter. It never mattered. He's gone...

Cyril approaches Elizabeth, uneasily. He bends down so as to look up at her. He squeezes both her hands in his own. She dives into his arms. He clutches her to him, and caresses the back of her head.

MONTAGE

INT. ARENA

Guards shuffle Rufus into a ring of sand before disappearing behind a gate. Atop high wood walls stand guards and spectators, pounding their feet and clapping excitedly. Rufus takes it all in. An indifferent Thomas catches his eye, standing next to Mathius.

Rufus sets his eyes on his opponent: a glamorous KNIGHT, in heavy and ornate armor. The Knight raises his sword readily. Rufus looks to a blade a few feet from him for a moment, then back to his opponent.

The Knight charges Rufus. Rufus eludes a swipe of the blade, then jams the Knight's head into the wall. The Knight collapses in a heap.

Mathius does not look amused.

EXT. FIELD

Thomas wraps a steel collar around Rufus' neck, and seals it on with a thick lock. Rufus searches his face, but gets no response.

Rufus, straps around his shoulders, drags an enormous plow through dirt, opening a massive trench. Thomas throws down a WHIP.

INT. ARENA

Rufus weaves around the swipes of another Knight, brings him to the ground, then puts him to sleep with a vice like choke hold.

EXT. COURTYARD

Rufus pushes a stoke in a massive gear that slowly opens a huge gate. WHIP.

INT. ARENA

Rufus, shackles around his wrists, looks thinner, leaner. He listens to the jeers of his audience, sourly.

INT. DUNGEON CELL

Rufus stands strung up in his cell, arms pulled over head. Thomas throws all he has into a WHIP.

INT. ARENA

Rufus sits atop another Knight, chains twisted around the man's throat. The Knight taps and claws desperately at him, and Rufus releases him.

INT. DUNGEON CELL

Rufus, beard scraggly and clothes tattered, sits against a wall. A bowl of unappetizing food slides towards him, and he devours it hurriedly.

INT. ARENA

Rufus, looking almost wild, stands with chains around his wrists and ankles. Hair hangs over his bowed head as spectators toss garbage at him and pour drinks over him.

A Knight, the fanciest yet, drops down his face guard and rushes at Rufus. Rufus catches hold of him by the helmet, and then headbutts him. The crowd GASPS. The metal dents and the Knight staggers, but Rufus isn't done.

Rufus swings his head down again and again until he's right on top of the Knight. Rufus doesn't stop until the man goes limp.

Mathius watches coldly as the audience stares in hushed horror. Rufus climbs to his feet, his face and beard doused in his own blood. Some guards rush to wake and help the Knight as Rufus shuffles casually back through the open gate.

END MONTAGE

FANTASY SEQUENCE

EXT. MEADOW

In warm yellow sunlight, Rufus sits against a tree among tall grass. Only visible from behind, Elizabeth sits not too far away, feet idly dangling into a small stream. Rufus struggles to sketch her, his hand unsteady.

MATHIUS(OS)

Stop.

END FANTASY SEQUENCE

INT. DUNGEON CELL

There's little left of the Rufus we know. Unkempt, mangy hair hangs over his face. His nails have grown sharp and yellow, and his body has dissolved into hard knots and sharp edges. Man has become beast.

Thomas stands behind Rufus' strung up body, panting, exhausted, lash in hand. Rufus' back is mutilated. His eyes flutter open.

(CONTINUED)

Mathius leans against the cell door, arms folded, his posture withdrawn and disgusted.

MATHIUS

Why... why must you debase us? You could be a hero. My most honoured guard. Instead of... this.

Rufus stares at him, indifferent.

MATHIUS

All men are soft. Some place or other.

Mathius sharply turns away and exits. Rufus' gaze follows him until he's gone.

INT. HOLDING QUARTERS

A series of boxes and baskets littered atop of a table, filled with Rufus' belongings. A fed up Mathius flips through them, observing the weapons and tools with contempt.

Scraps of faded parchment finally catch his eye. He sees a drawing of Elizabeth's silhouette, sitting in a meadow.

Mathius eagerly scours the collection of serene drawings. He finally comes upon a portrait of Elizabeth's face. His furious hands crumple the paper and toss them into the fire. He rushes out of the room.

INT. DUNGEON CELL

Rufus sits atop his knees, meditative. Chains at his wrists and ankles secure him to the wall. Suddenly, they begin to rattle.

An invisible pull yanks him forward as far as the chains allow, nearly tearing his limbs from his sockets. Rufus hardly winces.

The door to his cell bursts open, and Mathius strides in, escorted by Thomas and two more Elite Guards.

Mathius, breathing sharply, takes a moment to steady himself, stopping at his safe distance. Slowly, he lifts off his mask. His face is thin, handsome. With trembling, pleading eyes, he looks at Rufus.

(CONTINUED)

MATHIUS

Where is she?

Rufus shuts his eyes. Thomas slides out from behind Mathius, slapping Rufus across the face before dutifully returning to his spot. Rufus rolls his neck, and sets his gaze callously upon Mathius.

MATHIUS

My sister! What have you done?!
Hmm?! Abducted her?! Poisoned her
against me?! WHERE IS SHE?!

The invisible grip pulls Rufus nearer. The shackles strain where they meet the wall. Mathius straightens. Behind him, Thomas and the other guards drop to their knees. Rufus looks to them, then back to Mathius, confused.

The guards draw their swords, and set them upon their chests. Rufus doesn't waver.

Mathius waits. Rufus weakens, returning Mathius' pleading eyes. Mathius shuts his eyes and grits his teeth.

One guard drives a sword through his chest. Rufus winces, seething. Mathius stifles a wretch.

MATHIUS

MY KIN! All I've loved or ever
will! You've taken it all! And you
dare to keep the dearest of it from
me?!

Another guard, another sword. Rufus fights against his chains, practically frothing at the mouth. Without even a flourish of his hand Mathius, draws him nearer.

MATHIUS

A thousand of your brothers and
more won't stay my hand! No
fortune, no kingdom is worth a hair
on her head!

The wall cracks near the chains. Mathius takes one step too close, and Rufus rips free an arm from the wall. It's instantaneous. Just a flash.

INT/EXT. STRONGHOLD

At every corner, at every post, Elite Guards collapse, even in mid stride. Like marionettes cut from their strings.

INT. DUNGEON CELL

Thomas drops to the floor, blank eyes staring into space, sword clattering atop the stone.

Blood drips from Rufus' talon like nails. Mathius staggers back, wheezing, his throat slashed open.

Rufus pulls against his chains over and over as Mathius stumbles to the floor, desperately grasping at his neck with one hand and clawing at nothing with the other.

Finally, Rufus frees himself. He stands over the paling Mathius, who only looks up at him, aghast and gurgling. Rufus rolls chain around his fist, and drops down atop him. He rains blows upon him. Hesitantly at first. But then faster. Harder. Crueler. Endlessly. A violent, guttural scream escapes him.

After far too long, Rufus stops, exhausted, panting, slobbering. His entire body shakes, and he seems to shrink. He looks to his mentor.

RUFUS

Tom?

Rufus crawls over to him. He checks his pulse, and shakes him gently.

RUFUS

Tom?

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Cyril wakes in a warm bed, uneasy. His hair has grown out and his features have softened. He observes his surroundings, and calms a bit.

Beside him lays Elizabeth, sleeping peacefully. Her belly is swollen, well into pregnancy. Cyril pulls himself closer to her, and kisses her shoulder. She stirs, lips curling into the faintest smile.

INT. ROYAL PRISON

Rufus, with Thomas slung over his shoulder, walks through the quiet halls and corridors. Everywhere he looks, he sees fallen Nameless with empty eyes and limp limbs. He quickly learns to just set his sights forward.

He comes upon his spear, still standing where he left it, unmoved. He approaches it, and tears it from the stone like it's nothing.

EXT. MARKET - LATER

Cyril indifferently shovels some vegetables into a burlap sack, giving them only the most cursory of glances. Behind him, Marty approaches another elderly shop keeper, CLARENCE.

MARTY

Have you heard?

CLARENCE

Heard what?

MARTY

The Prince. He's dead.

Cyril pauses, attention piqued.

CLARENCE

Meaningless gossip.

MARTY

They said he was mauled. Like a beast tore his throat out. Him and his whole Guard. A hundred of them. Dead. A whole fortress of ghosts. You know what that means?

Cyril tightens up and closes his sack.

CLARENCE

Means someone is a hell of a liar.

MARTY

Means it's him. He's back. Zero.

CLARENCE

A hundred dead and you call it The Balance? I call it a plague.

Cyril walks away.

EXT. WATERING HOLE - NIGHT

A beautiful spot. A small waterfall surges water into a clear pool. Rufus sets Thomas down at the base of it, then shoots his arms into the water. He splashes water all over himself.

RUFUS

I really pity you, Tom. I must
stink something awful. But you're
not so hot either.

Rufus looks over to Thomas, who stares at nothing.

RUFUS

Say something. You're boring me.

Thomas doesn't budge. Rufus waits, frowning. He saunters over to Thomas and drags him with one hand closer to the water.

Rufus dunks Thomas' head into the water. He holds it. Holds it.

Rufus pulls Thomas out to no reaction. Rufus sits him back down against a rock, scanning his face for something, anything.

Rufus wipes him down a little.

RUFUS

I'll fix you. I promise.

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Bandit lies on the porch, watching idly and curiously as a middle aged DRUNK stomps around the yard, howling.

DRUNK

Elizabeth! Get out here, you fraud!

He downs the last of his glass bottle, then hurls it as the side of the house. It shatters, and Bandit trots inside.

INT. BEDROOM

Laying in bed with Elizabeth in his arms, Cyril listens to the commotion. She has her back pressed against him. Her eyes are winced shut.

(CONTINUED)

CYRIL(VO)

Every so often, something goes wrong. Corruption's too far gone, or they couldn't get here fast enough.

EXT. HOUSE

The Drunk picks up a rock, and hurls it through a window.

DRUNK

I trusted you! My boy! What now?!
What's left?!

INT. BEDROOM

Annoyed, Cyril begins to roll out of bed. Elizabeth pulls him back.

ELIZABETH

Don't worry about him. I need you.

Cyril frowns. He maneuvers himself back into bed. She pulls her arm back around him.

CYRIL(VO)

It's never her fault. She sees someone sick, and she has to help them. It never occurs to her that sickness might spread.

EXT. HOUSE

Heartbroken and eyes wet, The Drunk picks up whatever he can and hurls it at the house. He works himself to the point of exhaustion, finally collapsing in futility to the grass.

Alone and unanswered, the Drunk sobs meekly.

INT. BEDROOM

Elizabeth relaxes slightly. She opens her eyes and listens, sadly.

CYRIL(VO)

No beast too wild, no soul too lost. No matter how much they hurt her, no matter how impossible the task. She never learns. Never

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CYRIL(VO) (cont'd)
hardens. Just stays raw. Takes all
their pain for her own.

She shuffles out of bed.

EXT. HOUSE

Elizabeth comes out the front door, uncorking a glass bottle of water as she approaches the uneasy Drunk. Elizabeth bends down, and reaches out the bottle towards him. After a moment, he accepts it, and takes a sip.

INT. BEDROOM

Cyril watches the scene from the window.

CYRIL(VO)
It'll be the end of her.

INT. KITCHEN

Elizabeth stands at the sink, washing dishes. Cyril enters, sporting some heavy clothes and a big bag slung over his shoulders.

CYRIL
Stores are getting low. Looks like
I'll have to go to Nibelheim for
what we need. Could be gone a few
days.

ELIZABETH
Mm-hmm.

Elizabeth doesn't look up from the sink. Cyril approaches her, and wraps his arms around her.

CYRIL
I'll miss you.

ELIZABETH
Aww. Stay then. We'll just starve.
It won't be so bad.

Cyril SNICKERS.

(CONTINUED)

CYRIL
Anything not to part with you.

Elizabeth playfully slaps his cheek with a dripping wet hand.

ELIZABETH
Feed me, dummy.

CYRIL
Tell me you'll miss me. Tell me you
want me to stay.

Elizabeth finally turns her head and pecks him on the cheek.

ELIZABETH
I'll miss you and you should stay.

Elizabeth sets back to her work. Cyril releases her and heads for the door.

CYRIL
See you in a few days.

EXT. CAMP FIRE

Thomas sits propped up against a rock by a small fire. Rufus mashes berries into a small wooden bowl, the last ingredient in a greyish mush. Rain and wind howl outside.

RUFUS
This is Liz's go to. She swears by
it. You'll like her. When we get
you home... she'll fix you. She
fixes everything.

Rufus approaches the vacant Thomas. He stabs his spear into the earth, and spoons the mush into Thomas's mouth. He tries to stimulate consumption, pressing on his jaw.

RUFUS
I know it doesn't taste good. We'll
have go crazy when we get home. She
doesn't cook... but I do. When I'm
back in my kitchen, I'm pretty
good.

Rufus stares at Thomas, hopefully. Mush and saliva dribble out the side of his mouth. Rufus fades.

(CONTINUED)

RUFUS
She'll fix you.

FLASHBACK

EXT. DARK WOODS

Princess Elizabeth, in her formal attire save for her mask, sprints through trees, dodging branches, roots, and thorns. She rounds a trunk, and smashes right into Rufus (25). She bounces right off him, falling in mud.

RUFUS
Your brother's a shitty tracker.

Elizabeth stares up at Rufus as he plops down lazily atop a stump.

RUFUS
Do you know who I am?

ELIZABETH
Everyone knows who you are.

Rufus jams his spear into the mud, letting it stand on its own.

RUFUS
Everyone calls me something different. Seems one name is never enough. What do Gods call The God Killer?

Elizabeth searches his face, like it's a foolish question.

ELIZABETH
Death.

Rufus absorbs it without reaction.

RUFUS
What else do they say?

ELIZABETH
They say you were born in blood. That you killed with the first breath you took.

Rufus SNEERS.

(CONTINUED)

RUFUS

That part's true. My mother died giving birth to me. My father was a doctor. He delivered me.

Rufus eyes glaze over, solemn.

RUFUS

If he ever hated me for it, I never knew. All he did was love. The sick, the weak, the needy would come to him, and he'd do everything for them. I remember how terrible they could be when he failed. It never touched him. He'd say "Hate is just a symptom of pain." It was just sickness to him. Something to treat.

Rufus looks up at Elizabeth. Concern softens her features.

RUFUS

I was five when the soldiers came for him. Everyone knew what it meant. He thought it was an honor. They all did. People never saw things like I did. My father did nothing but give. With every breath, at every second. What did your family ever do but take?

Rufus leans towards her, menacingly.

RUFUS

No man may look upon the face of a God. He died so you could live.

Elizabeth hardens.

ELIZABETH

You were five when your father died?

Rufus scans her face, trying to infer her angle.

ELIZABETH

You don't remember him. You think you do. But it's just a dream. Your mind picking and choosing what suits you.

RUFUS
I remember him.

ELIZABETH
You don't.

RUFUS
I do.

Rufus' sternness freezes her.

ELIZABETH
What did he look like? What were
his mannerisms? His tastes?

Rufus turns away from her, dismissively.

RUFUS
He gave. He saved people.

ELIZABETH
And you? What have you given? What
have you won? You're no hero.
You're just another orphan maker.
You love your Father? Every step
you've taken has been away from
him.

Elizabeth manages to keep from wavering under his steely gaze. He breaks first, turning his head, ashamed. She softens when she sees how badly she's hurt him.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. CAMP FIRE

In the middle of a huge clearing, Rufus sits by a raging fire. Thomas sits propped against the rock across from him.

With a trembling hand, Rufus draws the frame of a feminine face on a small pad of paper. As soon as he attempts features, he falters. He tosses his pad aside, annoyed.

RUFUS
Can't see her face. She's all
that's ever mattered and I can't
see her face...

Rufus looks to Thomas. Silence lingers.

(CONTINUED)

RUFUS

Am I Death, Tom? Does anything I
touch stand a chance?

Thomas's head hangs limply, fire dancing in his empty eyes.

RUFUS

What's the first thing they always
tell us about the Gods? That
they're forever. They don't die.
Before me, they didn't.

Rufus hardens, grimly.

RUFUS

I wonder what they'll call whatever
kills me.

EXT. NEARBY OVERLOOK - LATER

Up on a hill, among tall grass in the dead of night, Cyril stealthily slinks along. He spots the camp, the fire still raging. He notices a lone cloaked figure, sitting against a rock, the famous spear propped alongside him.

Cyril crouches down. He pulls an arrow from his quiver and draws his bow, his sights set. He takes a deep, steadying breath. He releases.

In a flash, the arrow catches the cloaked figure in the back. The figure collapses to the dirt, limp. Cyril lowers his bow, and exhales, ambivalent. He pulls up his shrouds, masking himself.

EXT. CAMP FIRE - MOMENTS LATER

Cyril, unrecognizable, slides his bow around his shoulder as he enters the makeshift camp. He draws a knife from his belt, and rolls the bundle of cloaks over, ready to strike.

Cyril freezes, finding Thomas staring up at him blankly. Cyril quickly checks for a pulse, then draws back a shaking hand, in shock.

The bloody carcasses of a few rabbits THUMP as they hit the dirt. Cyril turns to find Rufus standing across from the scene, devastated, hunting knife in hand. Cyril crouches, paralyzed for a moment. He begins towards Rufus, knife at the ready.

(CONTINUED)

A lion wakes. Fury rips out of Rufus, and he makes a beeline for Cyril, striding right through the fire. Cyril just barely rolls away in time to dodge the first swing of the hunting knife, but Rufus catches him with a kick that sends him sprawling.

Rufus pulls his spear from the dirt and swings wildly. Cyril evades desperately. He digs a gloved hand into the fire, and hurls hot embers at Rufus. They bounce off his face, ineffectual. Rufus swings down his spear upon the fire, smashing the assembled logs and kindling to splinters.

Like a juggernaut, Rufus keeps coming, following Cyril away from the camp and into the night. Cyril quickly jukes out of constant pressure, and even manages counterstrikes. He lands fists, kicks, and even slices with his blade, but they're irrelevant. Nothing registers through Rufus' rage.

Rufus knocks Cyril's knife away. Cyril quickly draws his bow and an arrow, but Rufus finally gets a hold of him by the head. Like a ragdoll, he slams Cyril into the dirt, and pins him with a foot, spear at the ready.

The slam shakes Cyril loose from his shrouds, revealing his face. Rufus pauses, surprised. His eyes float down to the hand with which Cyril draws his arrow. He sees a ringed finger.

Cyril releases his arrow. It strikes true in Rufus' chest, and he staggers backwards before dropping to a knee. Cyril shoots to his feet, and Rufus just sucks air, looking up at Cyril, heartbroken.

With quivering resolve, Rufus slowly lifts himself up. Cyril draws quickly, firing an arrow. And another. And another, until finally Rufus falls to his knees, eyes wet.

Cyril approaches, arrow at rest but pointed right at Rufus' head. Rufus turns his face away, trying to strengthen. Cyril pauses.

RUFUS

Is she... Are you happy?

Cyril swallows hard, grimacing.

CYRIL

If she was... if I told you we were... could you stay away? For her?

The question takes the wind right out of Rufus. His griefstricken head sways for a moment, but he gathers himself, hardening.

(CONTINUED)

RUFUS

Yes.

Cyril can't stand it. He grits his teeth and draws his bow, string trembling. Rufus' entire body sags as he lowers his head.

It takes an excruciating moment, but Cyril lowers his bow.

CYRIL

I hope she helps you.

Rufus' eyes flutter open as Cyril pulls up his hood. Cyril walks past Rufus, and never looks back.

Soon, Rufus finds himself alone. He wheezes behind a tightly shut mouth. He tries to rise to his feet, but he collapses into the mud, weak.

Slowly, he fights back to his knees. It takes all he has to stagger to his feet. He puts one foot in front of the other, like a straight line is a war. He shuffles and limps like infinite weight is on his shoulders.

He drags his spear behind him, the blade scraping among the dirt and rock. He manages to quicken his clumsy gait, hungry, hopeful, desperate. He drops his spear, abandoning it, practically running.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Elizabeth stands over the sink, an apron around her swollen belly and her sleeves rolled up. She scrubs at dishes, her brow furrowed, thorough, focused, and intent.

Suddenly, Bandit's furious BARKING and SNAPPING rings out from the front yard. She pauses.

THE END.