

Nocturne

Pilot: "This is Not a Dream"

written by

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EXT. CASTLE NOCTURNE - FRONT FIELDS - NIGHT

CLOSE ON: Blades of grass in an open field.

Moonlight.

An eerie calm. A quiet whistling of wind. Then--

A pair of FEET hover past. Shoeless. Gnarled, muddy toes, nails chewed and cracked, pointed like a ballerina's. They don't touch the ground. In the frame for only a moment before they move out of sight.

Another pair follows. Another pair, and another. Stressful music swells as the number of feet increases--we are witnessing the passage of a floating ARMY.

The music stops.

The silence returns.

From the field to:

CASTLE NOCTURNE. Stately and medieval, steep STONE BATTLEMENTS surrounding a towering estate.

We move around the castle...the impenetrable FRONT GATES...moonlight falling on the GARDENS...settling on:

A PALE MAN standing on a PARAPET. Blood red armor and a rapier at his side. Long brown hair blowing in the night wind. Jagged scar across his face.

Pale as a GHOST.

He looks out away from the castle. Unmoving. Watching. We follow his gaze to:

The dense tree-line of a VAST FOREST at the edge of an open field. Branches waving slightly in the wind. Then--

SOMETHING MOVES.

A creature--no, a BODY, something HUMAN--stumbles from the forest.

We stay at a distance, not close enough to see details of the form--but they look rough. The person can barely stay on their feet. They stumble forward a few steps then COLLAPSE.

As they struggle to stand--muffled SHOUTS begin. The person has been sighted--in the background we hear the creaking of the unseen GATES, and the shouting grows louder.

ARMED SOLDIERS rush into the bottom of the frame. They cross the field, running to the aid of the struggling form.

The sound of BRISK FOOTSTEPS bridges us to:

INT. CASTLE NOCTURNE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

CLOSE ON: TWO PAIRS OF FEET walk briskly down the curving stone hallways of CASTLE NOCTURNE. One wears leather boots, the other wears worn-out moccasins.

ELIZABETH

She couldn't come back in the light of day, it had to be at night. Nothing good ever comes at night. When did she appear?

AARON

Maybe...20 minutes ago? She stumbled out of the woods--

ELIZABETH

Alone?

AARON

Yes. Alone.

ANGLE ON: ELIZABETH (53) a severe looking KNIGHT with military-short hair, and AARON (13) her small, frightened squire. Elizabeth is dressed for battle, chain mail under her tunic, SWORD at her side.

Torches mounted on the walls. The pair moves in and out of shadow as they walk.

ELIZABETH

Where are the others? There was no one else?

AARON

No, ma'am. Should we...let her in?

ELIZABETH

Should we--what? She's still outside the gate?

AARON

I didn't have--entrance to the castle at night requires the approval of a senior--

ELIZABETH

Of course we--

(Beat. Brief contemplation.)

Let her in. Why wouldn't we--she's not a threat. She's not a threat.

INT. CASTLE NOCTURNE - HOLDING ROOM DOOR - NIGHT

Elizabeth and Aaron outside a large WOODEN DOOR.

Elizabeth stands rigid, staring at the door. Hand on her sword, as if she's ready to draw at a moment's notice.

Aaron stares at her, concerned but silent.

FOOTSTEPS shake them from their thoughts. They look up to:

A stately, slimy MAN, flanked by two spear-wielding GUARDS, rounding the corner. This is MR. BLACKWELL (45) greying hair, slickly dressed in dark clothes. His left eye is sharp, his right pale and dead under a jagged scar.

The guards stop with a flick of Mr. Blackwood's wrist. He walks a few paces closer before stopping as well.

BLACKWELL

Lady Elizabeth. Have you spoken to her?

ELIZABETH

I thought you would prefer that I wait.

(Beat)

For you.

Mr. Blackwell's good eye sizes Elizabeth up, notes the chain mail.

BLACKWELL

I thought, given your relationship--

ELIZABETH

I followed protocol, Mr. Blackwell. I would think you of all people would appreciate that.

Mr. Blackwell pauses, then nods sharply. He moves for the door. Elizabeth follows.

INT. CASTLE NOCTURNE - HOLDING ROOM - NIGHT

A WOMAN sits at a table in a stone room. The room is unnaturally bright--the light doesn't seem to have a source.

This is TETHYS (38). Long hair blocks most of her face from view. A long cut runs down her cheek, partly healed and smeared with mud and blood. Her clothes torn and dirty. Her head bowed.

Off Tethys to:

TITLE OVER BLACK:

i. Interview

The door CREAKS OPEN, bridging us back to TETHYS' FACE.

Her head snaps up, eyes darting towards the sound. We get a good look at her eyes for the first time--gaze as hard as steel.

Elizabeth enters first. Her face screws up in distress at the sight of Tethys. They lock eyes.

CUT TO:

IMAGE: Elizabeth and Tethys, bodies pressed together in bed. Elizabeth's eyes are soft, her cheeks rosy. Tethys strokes her hair and dips her chin to kiss her lover's neck.

CUT TO:

Elizabeth and Tethys in the interview room, eyes still locked.

Mr. Blackwell pushes past Elizabeth, breaking the silence.

BLACKWELL

Lady Tethys.

Tethys breaks eye contact and snaps her eyes to Mr. Blackwell. He pulls out the chair across from Tethys.

BLACKWELL

We are, of course, grateful to see that you have returned safe and--

TETHYS

I would like to speak with Elizabeth.

A beat.

BLACKWELL

Well. There she is.

Tethys throws him a withering look. Elizabeth stares at them, eyes flicking back and forth.

TETHYS

(without looking
from Blackwell)
What is it you want?

BLACKWELL

To ensure the safety and well-being of this Castle and the kingdom at large.

TETHYS

No. What do you want with *me*?

BLACKWELL

I gave you my answer.

TETHYS

...You believe me a threat?

BLACKWELL

Is anyone--or any *thing*--following you?

TETHYS

(to Elizabeth)

This was your doing, wasn't it? You did this.

BLACKWELL

There are protocols.

TETHYS

(to Blackwell, shortly)

I'm not a commoner, Blackwell, I wrote the fucking protocols.

(to Elizabeth)

Of course you didn't trust me. This was never going to work. *We* were never--

A LOUD SCRAPE--Mr. Blackwell pointedly pulls the chair from under the table. After a tense moment, he sits.

ELIZABETH

Are you ok?

TETHYS

(coldly)

Do I fucking look ok, Elizabeth?

BLACKWELL

(without turning around)

Madame Steward, I must respectfully request that you leave.

Anger boils beneath Elizabeth's expression.

ELIZABETH

I am in command of this castle,
and all orders made for its well-
being are--

BLACKWELL

(clearly not a request)
It was not an order. It was
a request.

ELIZABETH

I can handle myself.

BLACKWELL

You are *compromised*. And I have
questions I need to ask for which
I would rather you not be present.

A beat. Elizabeth exhales, breaking the silence.

ELIZABETH

(to Tethys)
We expected you back over a week
ago, and we had no word. I am glad
you returned safely and... that is
all.

She turns on her heel and exits.

INT. CASTLE NOCTURNE - HOLDING ROOM DOOR - NIGHT

Aaron picks at his teeth outside the room. Blackwell's guards
flanking the door.

The door SQUEAKS open. Elizabeth charges out, startling Aaron
and the guards. She slams it behind her with a CLAP.

AARON

Ma'am?

Elizabeth is already partway down the hall. Aaron hesitates--
does she want him with her?--then runs to catch up.

He only makes it a few steps before Elizabeth stops short. She
turns her head a fraction in Aaron's direction.

ELIZABETH

I need a scrying window. In the
study down the hall.

AARON

The sorcerers will be asleep--

ELIZABETH

Then wake them. And be quick
about it.

AARON

What do you want them to scry?

ELIZABETH

The fuck do you think I want them
to scry?

INT. CASTLE NOCTURNE - STUDY - NIGHT

Fire crackling in the fireplace of a book-lined study.

Elizabeth stands, arms crossed, staring at a curved, ornately decorative mirror on the wall--Snow White's Evil Queen, but with a sword. No sound but the fire and Elizabeth's labored breathing.

The door opens. Aaron stumbles in, panting--he's been running. Elizabeth hardly looks his way--this is a pattern with them.

AARON

He wanted to know why, but--

ELIZABETH

I trust you told him to mind his
orders and do as I requested.

AARON

Yes, ma'am. It should--

The mirror on the wall FLASHES. Aaron jumps. Elizabeth does not.

The mirror becomes a WINDOW, wreathed in an otherworldly light. The edges of the glass RIPPLE, shifting like water.

Through the window we see: Tethys and Mr. Blackwell, sitting just as we left them. Neither Tethys nor Mr. Blackwell responds to the appearance of the window--they can't see it.

AARON

Are we--should we be
watching...this...

Elizabeth glares. He withers back and is silent.

TETHYS

I know what you want.

INT. CASTLE NOCTURNE - HOLDING ROOM - NIGHT

Mr. Blackwell leans forward, intrigued.

BLACKWELL

Do you now?

TETHYS

You want to know whether I killed
my team.

BLACKWELL

(smirking)

Do I now?

TETHYS

Or are you holding me here and
interrogating me--

BLACKWELL

(interrupting)

I wouldn't call this an
interrogation--

TETHYS

--*interrogating me* because you
didn't get enough of a power trip
during daylight hours?

BLACKWELL

I'm not interrogating you.

TETHYS

Then what do you want?

He pauses.

BLACKWELL

Who are you?

A pause. Tethys takes this in, she bursts out laughing.

TETHYS

You don't know who I am?

BLACKWELL

I don't know if *you* know who
you are.

She stops laughing.

TETHYS

My name is Tethys of Nocturne. I am the Knight Commander of Castle Nocturne. I am charged by the Stewardess, at the discretion of the King, with the defense and protection of all the eastern lands, from the mountains to the Darklands.

(Beat.)

Good enough?

BLACKWELL

Of course not. Why did you volunteer?

TETHYS

I thought I'd make a better soldier than a seamstress--

BLACKWELL

Stop. Why did you volunteer for this mission.

Tethys narrows her eyes, but her voice remains even.

TETHYS

Are you trying to catch me in a lie?

Mr. Blackwell grins, sickening and sinister. He's...enjoying this?

BLACKWELL

I am not.

TETHYS

Could have fooled me.

BLACKWELL

My trust in you would come easier if you would provide straight answers to my questions.

TETHYS

I never do anything straight.

A beat. Mr. Blackwell leans back.

BLACKWELL

All right. I am attempting to test your memory.

Off Tethys's face to:

IMAGE: a MAN (42) in a green tunic, arms spread wide in welcome...

IMAGE: a rotted, mangled CORPSE, twisted limbs and partially decayed flesh, lays in the center of a green field...

IMAGE: a single SKULL--body nowhere to be seen--sits centered in a dusty living room...

IMAGE: a YOUNG GIRL, wrists lashed to a cross, flames licking at her ankles while her face screws up to scream...

IMAGE: Tethys, blood gushing from a GASH in her forehead. A SWORD held aloft, guarding a FRIGHTENED GIRL. Shadows ripple around them, figures moving closer and closer as Tethys lets out a piercing, desperate howl...

And back to:

The Holding Room. Tethys breathing a little heavier, her eyes unfocused. All at once her gaze snaps back to Mr. Blackwell.

TETHYS

I know who I am.

Mr. Blackwell leans forward.

BLACKWELL

What happened to the remainder of your party?

TETHYS

We failed. They died.

He takes this in.

BLACKWELL

Do you care to elaborate on the circumstances of--

TETHYS

I care to get a good nights rest before I get interrogated by some royal stooge in my own home.

A beat.

BLACKWELL

I have sympathy for your plight, Lady Tethys. You are, by all accounts, a decorated and respected member of the guard of Castle Nocturne.

TETHYS

I'm the Knight Commander of the guard at Castle Nocturne, not a member.

BLACKWELL

That remains to be seen.

TETHYS

Excuse me?

BLACKWELL

A Commander, I would expect, would recognize the *many* dangers of allowing the lone survivor of a catastrophically failed mission to wander back through the gates without even the slightest debriefing. A Commander would subject herself to all manner of appropriate questioning to ensure the safety of every person within her dependency. A Commander would--

TETHYS

Yes, yes, your penis is very large, sir, and I am sure you wield it well.

Mr. Blackwell is unfazed.

BLACKWELL

Very well. In simpler terms.

TETHYS

(dripping with malice)
Thank you.

BLACKWELL

You will answer my questions. If you do not, you will not be released upstairs. You will remain in quarantine--

TETHYS

(interrupting)
In prison.

BLACKWELL

(conceding)
If you like. In *prison* until such time as you are deemed no longer a risk to your countrymen.

(MORE)

BLACKWELL (CONT'D)

At which point at my request to the King, you will be stripped of your title, ejected from the castle, and left to live out your days rotting in the mud outside some filthy tavern, telling stories to the barman of your glorious days as the Commander of Castle Nocturne.

Tethys leans back in her chair.

TETHYS

Will you bring a cot to my prison cell, or would that be considered too humane?

Mr. Blackwell stares at her coldly.

TETHYS

Fine.
(A beat).
Ask away.

BLACKWELL

Why did you volunteer for this mission?

TETHYS

I didn't. It was an assignment.

Mr. Blackwell leans back in his chair, satisfied.

BLACKWELL

Well. Now we're getting somewhere.

TITLE OVER BLACK:

ii. Tethys

INT. CASTLE NOCTURNE - ELIZABETH'S CHAMBERS - DAY

A pair of ankles, intertwined, peeking out from underneath red and gold bedsheets.

We pull up to: ELIZABETH and TETHYS. Elizabeth lies half asleep, eyes shut, mostly covered by a sheet. Her body is tense. Tethys, sensing Elizabeth's discomfort, strokes her lover's hair. A tender moment passes.

Elizabeth stirs at Tethys' touch, then snuggles backwards into her lover. Tethys stops stroking and wraps Elizabeth in her arms.

ELIZABETH
You're already awake?

TETHYS
Just looking at you.

ELIZABETH
You needed to wake up early
for that?

TETHYS
Who knows when I'll get
another chance?

Elizabeth's eyes flicker open. Tethys says this soothingly,
but Elizabeth heard the bait. She doesn't take it.

ELIZABETH
Well then we might as well make
the best of the moment.

Tethys tips her head and kisses the back of Elizabeth's neck.
Elizabeth turns over and they share a soft, sweet kiss.

TETHYS
Was it a nightmare?

ELIZABETH
Of a sort.

TETHYS
Tell me. Ease your
burdens, milady.

She nuzzles her nose against Elizabeth's while she speaks.

ELIZABETH
(laughing)
It was nothing.

TETHYS
What am I here for if not to hear
your worries?

The smile fades a bit from Elizabeth's face.

ELIZABETH
You *do* have a job. Or have
you forgotten?

Elizabeth pulls away and out from under the sheet. Tethys' arm
flops onto the bed.

The moment broken, we pull out to get a first look at
ELIZABETH'S ROOM, ornate and lavish, deep reds with golden
trimmings.

Sunlight peeks through stained glass windows, speckling the room with a warm, pinkish glow.

TETHYS

Not here at the Castle, I meant--

ELIZABETH

I know what you meant.

Elizabeth moves to her dresser and selects a long green dress.

ELIZABETH

I have meetings with the border surveyors this morning. I need to prepare.

TETHYS

If you don't want to talk about your nightmare that's fine, we don't have to.

Elizabeth turns to a large mirror beside the dresser. She holds the dress to her body. She looks regal and prim, almost royal. Wrong message--she shakes her head and puts it back.

ELIZABETH

And you have training sessions to supervise.

TETHYS

I know my schedule, those aren't for another hour--don't brush me off.

Elizabeth flicks through the wardrobe, dissatisfied.

ELIZABETH

The taxes are due to be collected at the end of next week, I have to ensure the accountants have their records in order.

TETHYS

What are you doing right now? What is this?

ELIZABETH

I've been
thinking we
should expand our
defensive patrols
out past the
forest, perhaps
to encircle the
outer villages--

TETHYS

We had an
agreement--no
shop talk in bed.
Lizzie. Are you
listening to me?

Elizabeth pulls another outfit, this time a grayish cloak. Too grubby--she replaces it.

ELIZABETH

I have some preliminary plans
drawn up. I can have Aaron bring
them over, but I need you to
examine them. The current routes
are good, but I'm concerned that
we need to be looking farther out,
that we might not see something
coming until--

Tethys' hand creeps around Elizabeth's waist, and Elizabeth jumps. She hadn't noticed Tethys standing.

Tethys hugs her close from behind, buries her face in Elizabeth's hair.

TETHYS

Hey. Deep breaths. We have a rule
for a reason.

Elizabeth bristles. She doesn't look comfortable in Tethys' arms--she's stiff as a board.

ELIZABETH

That was your rule, not mine.

Tethys smiles.

TETHYS

If I agreed to your rules, you
have to agree to mine.

Tethys pulls away, smacking Elizabeth's ass as she does. Elizabeth smiles in spite of herself.

Tethys crosses the room and takes a grey robe from a hook on the wall. She pulls it on and ties it around her waist.

ELIZABETH

What--where are you going?

TETHYS

Thought I'd go round up the troops, see if they'd like to join us for a little roll in the hay before warm-ups.

(off Elizabeth's terrified face)

I am *joking*. If we're done cuddling for the morning, I'm going to wash up before I'm due on the grounds.

ELIZABETH

Dressed...like that?

TETHYS

What, do you expect me to get fully dressed before I go to the wash room?

A beat. The smile fades from Tethys' face: this is clearly exactly what Elizabeth expects.

TETHYS

Come on.

ELIZABETH

I just think--

TETHYS

It's *around the corner*.

ELIZABETH

And that's a corner that any one of our subordinates could be around. And if they saw you in a state of disrobe--

TETHYS

That's what the robe is for!

ELIZABETH

You know what I mean! We are officers of the highest order.

TETHYS

No, you are an officer of the highest order.

ELIZABETH

What is that supposed to mean?

TETHYS

I mean I'm not *you*, my responsibilities--

ELIZABETH

Oh, now you care about your responsibilities, that's a welcome change.

TETHYS

I care about my squad. My trainees, my--

ELIZABETH

Isn't that grand for you! I have to worry about more than a few soldiers following a few orders, I have to shepherd this entire province--

TETHYS

Shepherd this province then, chosen one, I'm not trying to stop you, I'm trying to go to the wash.

Elizabeth slams the wardrobe shut.

ELIZABETH

You're not an imbecile, Tethys, don't make me talk to you like you don't understand the rules.

TETHYS

I'm not making you do anything, you seem capable of choosing your words on your own.

ELIZABETH

You want me to spell it out?

TETHYS

They say communication is key in any relationship.

This sets Elizabeth off. She stalks across the room, closing the gap between them with deliberate, furious steps.

ELIZABETH

Every single thing you do reflects back on me. Every step you take, every decision, every order you issue without considering the consequences, they fall at my feet. They fall there because I am your boss, and they fall DOUBLE because we're--because we're--

TETHYS

Because we're fucking?

Elizabeth reaches Tethys, their faces now inches apart. Elizabeth's face goes red.

ELIZABETH

Because I love you, you absolutely infuriating--the things you do have consequences, Tethys. The choices you make have consequences.

TETHYS

You think I don't take my job seriously?

ELIZABETH

I think you don't take me seriously.

A knock sounds at the door. Elizabeth's head snaps towards it, but Tethys' gaze stays locked forward.

AARON

(off-screen, hesitant)

M-Ma'am. And, uh, ma'am.
Excuse me.

A beat. Tethys shrugs off her robe in one fluid movement.

ELIZABETH

(hissing)

Don't--

TETHYS

(firm)

Come in.

The door cracks open and Aaron peeks his head inside.

Aaron's POV: the two women, both fully nude, both looking furious. Aaron yelps and quickly retreats.

Elizabeth stares at Tethys, a mixture of hurt, anger, and confusion in her eyes. Tethys' face is like stone. She speaks to Aaron without looking away from Tethys.

ELIZABETH

What, Aaron?

AARON

I'm s-sorry, ma'am, I didn't mean to disturb, but there's--I mean to say--

ELIZABETH

Spit. It. Out.

Aaron breathes deeply. Tries again.

AARON

(off-screen)

There's--a boy from one of the villages...he requests aid.

ELIZABETH

I'll be down shortly.

AARON

Yes, ma'ams--I mean, ma'am and ma'am--miladies--

ELIZABETH

That will be all, Aaron.

The door shuts with a snap.

A cold, sickening moment. The gravity of what she's done seems to hit Tethys and her face begins to soften.

Elizabeth's face does not.

ELIZABETH

(to Tethys)

Get. Dressed.

Elizabeth stalks away. We stay on Tethys' face as it continues to soften, settling on distress.

EXT. CASTLE NOCTURNE - TRAINING GROUNDS - DAY

Harsh summer sun beats down on a row of archery targets at the end of an open field. Stillness, and then--

THWOK. THWOK. THWOKTHWOKTHWOK.

ARROWS hit the canvas of each target, at inconsistent times. These arrows were not loosed by experienced soldiers--most miss their bullseyes, and some hit only the very edge of the canvas. Only one arrow hits dead center, farthest target to the right.

TETHYS
 (off-screen)
 IS THAT THE BEST YOU CAN
 DO, SOLDIERS?

We see: THE TRAINEES. A sweaty, motley lot--that was clearly the best they could do.

Tethys stands on a balcony up above them, watching their progress. Slightly behind her, a MAN, grungy but muscular, stands behind her, arms crossed. This is DORCAS (35), First Lieutenant of Castle Nocturne. TATTOOS of arcane RUNES wind up his bare arms, disappearing under a sleeveless tunic.

TETHYS
 Erik! Simon! What in the hell
 was that?

Two trainees at the far end of the row--ERIK and SIMON, late teens, both green as hell--try to make themselves as small as possible.

ERIK
 (whispering)
 You distracted me!

SIMON
 (hissing, slightly louder)
 Fuck you, Erik, you're gonna
 get us--

TETHYS
 Boys! Focus!

The two snap nervously to attention, shooting angry sideways glances at each other. Next to the boys, at the left end of the line of trainees, a YOUNG DARK ELF GIRL snickers.

TETHYS
 In the field, you will not have
 the room for errors or
 distractions. There are all kinds
 of horrors and monsters in this
 world. You are in a castle, on a
 training ground, fully rested,
 surrounded by allies, without a
 demon chasing you down and
 threatening to tear out your
 throat. If you cannot focus now
 you WILL NOT. BE ABLE. TO FOCUS.
 WHEN. IT. COUNTS. Kira!

The elf--this is KIRA (22) lithe and rebellious--snaps to attention.

KIRA

Milady!

TETHYS

On my mark!

In one smooth motion, Kira spins around, draws an arrow from her quiver, nocks it, aims.

TETHYS

Ready...

*(Kira raises her bow and
draws back)*

MARK!

Kira releases. CAMERA PANS to follow the arrow's journey across the field, finishing on a THWOK as it makes contact with the canvas. Another bullseye.

TETHYS

Ready...Mark! Ready...Mark!

Ready...Mark!

THWOK. THWOK. THWOK.

Three more arrows hit the canvas, perfectly clustered in the bullseye.

BACK ON: Kira's satisfied face, clearly holding back the urge to gloat. Erik and Simon jealously glare.

Above them, Tethys grins.

TETHYS

(to Dorcas)

She's one to watch.

Dorcas grins slightly but says nothing.

TETHYS

ERIK!

Erik nervously fumbles for his bow and arrow.

Behind Tethys and Dorcas, a DARK, HOODED FIGURE steps out of the shadows--was she there before?--and glides toward them.

TETHYS

Ready!--

DARK FIGURE

Lady Tethys. Your presence
is needed.

Tethys sharply turns to see: LADY LYNDIS (35), pale and mysterious, wearing a dark cloak.

Her hood is pulled over her eyes, leaving only her blood red lips visible.

TETHYS

Lyndis?

LYNDIS

Milady. I bring a message from the Stewardess.

Back on the fields, Erik holds his position. Simon snickers.

ERIK

(whispering)

What? Am I doing it wrong?

INT. CASTLE NOCTURNE - HOLDING ROOM DOOR - DAY

Tethys stalks down the hall, flanked by Lyndis. Shadows lurk just at the edge of the torch-light.

TETHYS

And they need me why, exactly?

They round a corner.

LYNDIS

You can ask for yourself.

The corner turn reveals: Elizabeth and Aaron, waiting outside a wooden door. We've seen nearly this exact shot before.

Elizabeth looks up as they approach.

ELIZABETH

Tethys? What are you doing here?

TETHYS

You called for me?

ELIZABETH

Excuse me?

TETHYS

I was told--

Tethys turns toward Lyndis--but the mysterious woman has vanished. Tethys furrows her brow in irritation.

TETHYS

Never mind. It appears I was--

MR. BLACKWELL brushes past her as he turns the corner, bumping Tethys in the shoulder.

BLACKWELL
Ladies. Boy.

He reaches the door before he notices Elizabeth glaring at Tethys.

BLACKWELL
Have I...interrupted something?

The door opens from the inside. MATTHIAS (66), a gruff, full bearded, slow-moving warlock, exits the room. He shuts the door behind him.

MATTHIAS
He's all yours.

ELIZABETH
You believe him to be safe, Matthias?

MATTHIAS
I wouldn't guarantee it. He's stable enough, I suppose.

Elizabeth shoots Tethys another look. The gears turn in her head, then--she nods. A quiet order. Tethys steps closer.

TETHYS
You suppose?

MATTHIAS
I suppose.

TETHYS
Matthias--

MATTHIAS
I did my scans, I cast some spells, and...
(hesitantly)
I sense no danger.

Elizabeth raises an eyebrow. Mr. Blackwell crosses his arms.

TETHYS
But?

MATTHIAS
But he skeeves me out.

Tethys chuckles. The others do not.

MATTHIAS
I trust my gut more than I trust my spells.

ELIZABETH

You can't be more...precise?

Matthias hears the condescension. He doesn't rise to it.

MATTHIAS

Not with confidence.

ELIZABETH

You are the Head of Mystical--

MATTHIAS

I know my title, thank
you, Lizzie.

Elizabeth squirms at the nickname.

MATTHIAS

I am knowledgeable, and you could
consider me an expert, but what I
am not is the most powerful
warlock in the kingdom. If the
right person wanted to get a spell
past me, they could.

BLACKWELL

And you believe--

MATTHIAS

It is unwise with magic to speak
in definitives. It will find a way
to contradict you.

TETHYS

Matthias. Not a diagnosis. Just
your opinion.

MATTHIAS

Be wary. That's the best I can do.

INT. CASTLE NOCTURNE - HOLDING ROOM - DAY

CLOSE ON: a pair of small, dirty hands hold a steaming mug of
tea. The mug shakes as the hands shiver.

Wider to reveal a ELLIOT (18), boyish. Dirty, shaky and
frightened, clothes torn, a blanket around his shoulders.

Elliot sits at the table in the holding room--some time later
this will be Tethys' seat. He looks shaken, unsure of what's
coming.

The door opens. He looks up.

Elizabeth, Mr. Blackwell, and Tethys file in. Tethys shuts the door behind her. She shoots Elliot a sympathetic look. The other two are all business.

ELIZABETH

I'm told your name is Elliot?

Elliot nods shakily.

ELIZABETH

I apologize if we seem inhospitable. We aren't used to visitors at Castle Nocturne. There are few travelers this close to the Darklands.

ELLIOT

I'm--

He breaks off, unsure.

TETHYS

Go on, it's all right.

Elliot looks at her, grateful. His voice is folksy, the voice of a farmer's boy.

ELLIOT

(quickly)

I'm from one of the villages 'tween here and the Wall. We're the closest one to it, I think. I've never been this far west 'fore, and I'm honored to be granted a moment of your time ma'am. And sir. And ma'am. And--

BLACKWELL

(interrupting)

Which village, child?

ELLIOT

N-Noor, sir. I'm from Noor.

TETHYS

I think we're getting ahead of ourselves.

Tethys walks closer to the table, hand outstretched.

TETHYS

My name is Tethys. It's nice to meet you, Elliot.

Elliot eyes her hand uncertainly. He grasps it and the two make eye contact.

Tethys looks to the other two, awaiting their introductions. They don't come. Annoyed at their coldness, Tethys slides into the chair across the table from Elliot.

TETHYS

This is Lady Elizabeth, the
Stewardess of Castle Nocturne. And
this is Mr. Blackwell. The...

She trails off, then glances towards him uncertainly. Elizabeth looks as if she regrets allowing Tethys to join.

BLACKWELL

High Auditor of the Royal Court.

ELLIOT

M-milord.

BLACKWELL

I am no lord, boy. I hold
no command.

Tethys shoots an apologetic look towards Elizabeth. Elizabeth ignores it.

ELIZABETH

I'm told your village has
requested our aid.

ELLIOT

Yes, ma'am.

ELIZABETH

And what service might we offer to
the village of Noor?

ELLIOT

W-we found a body. And none--no
one is sure what to do.

BLACKWELL

The usual patrols will be around
within a week, I would assume.
Unless...
(glancing to Tethys)
...they have fallen off schedule.

TETHYS

I can assure you they have not.

ELLIOT

Sir. It's not just the body. It's
that it--the body was...wrong,
sir.

Both Elizabeth and Mr. Blackwell lean forward.

ELIZABETH	BLACKWELL
What do you--	Wrong how?

Elizabeth shoots Mr. Blackwell a dirty look. He does not seem to notice.

ELLIOT

It looked like nothing I'd ever seen. It's all twisted. My father says he thinks it's been burnt, but that's not the worst of it. It looks...rotted. Only on parts of it. Around the face, and around its...chest...

Tethys looks at him with sympathy. She reaches out, takes his hand in hers, and--

We flash to:

IMAGE: The body. It lies crumpled in the center of a dirt clearing--trees surround the area. We are zoomed out at first, then--we're BANG UP CLOSE on her face. The skin peeled away from blackened, shriveled gums. Her arm twisted and mangled, as if trying to break free from her body. The flesh on her leg decayed, exposing bone. Maggots squirm from her breast.

Her head turns toward the camera. One eye glassy and cold, the other shriveled and black--a maggot wiggles out from the center of the eyeball.

The corpse's mouth **opens**.

Tethys releases Elliot's hand, clearly shaken.

She stares at him--what is this boy?

Behind them, Elizabeth's face has gone cold.

ELIZABETH

Noor is a small village. You know who the body is, yes?

Elliot flinches at her tone. Tethys looks at Elizabeth, incredulous but still recovering from the vision.

ELLIOT

There's a girl been missing from town for a couple days, but...it hasn't been long enough for her to... to look like that. And...

He trails off again. Mr. Blackwell picks his nails impatiently.

BLACKWELL

Well?

ELLIOT

All of us felt it. Everyone who was near her--near the body. It was like...like the air in my lungs was rancid. L-like my body didn't work quite right anymore, and everything was heavy and if I told my arms to move I wasn't sure they would. It was overwhelming. It was like...like my insides were dying. Like I was the one that was rotting, not her.

A beat of silence. Tethys looks at him with sympathy.

ELIZABETH

And how would--

BLACKWELL

Nothing in
your story--

Tethys grasps them both by the arms. A silence takes the room.

TETHYS

(to Elliot)

If you'll excuse us for a
moment, please.

INT. CASTLE NOCTURNE - HOLDING ROOM DOOR - DAY

The trio exits the room. Aaron stands outside, awaiting his knight. Elizabeth gestures to dismiss him and he scrambles to give them space.

Tethys turns on them as soon as the door shuts.

TETHYS

(savagely)

Well that went splendidly, yes?

ELIZABETH

I should be
asking you--

BLACKWELL

I believe that
if we--

TETHYS

Nuh-uh. One at a time.

Elizabeth's eyes flare furiously. Mr. Blackwell looks amused.

TETHYS

That is a child in there.

BLACKWELL

He's a young man.

ELIZABETH

A young man with a *formal* request for aid. If his village leadership saw fit to send him as their official--

TETHYS

He's clearly traumatized.

ELIZABETH

If he is requesting we send our troops into a dangerous area, the procedures might seem cold, but--

TETHYS

Cold? You two were about to tear him apart!

BLACKWELL

We had a few simple questions--

TETHYS

And that's another thing.
(turning on Blackwell)
You need to leave this to us.

BLACKWELL

Excuse me?

TETHYS

You're in the way. I'd be happy to write you a report once we're finished for your...audit. But this is a job for the Stewardess and her head of defense. Your input will not be required.

Mr. Blackwell's frown flips to a grin. It's an unnerving, slimy shift.

BLACKWELL

Very well. I look forward to your report. If I may be of any assistance...

ELIZABETH

(falling in line)
We'll let you know.

Mr. Blackwell looks between the women, bows slightly, and leaves them in the hallway alone.

Tethys opens her mouth, but Elizabeth holds up a hand.

ELIZABETH

We will discuss this later.

TETHYS

Lizzie--

ELIZABETH

No, Tethys.

Elizabeth turns slightly and gestures for Aaron to return. Aaron reappears from the shadows.

ELIZABETH

We're dropping this.

TETHYS

What?

ELIZABETH

Instruct the next patrol to look into it on their path next week. We can spare a couple of soldiers--low ranking, please, I don't want to waste manpower on this--to guide him back and watch over the town until then.

TETHYS

You're not even going to look into it?

Elizabeth glares--that would be a no.

ELIZABETH

(to Aaron)

I want a room made up for the boy in the western domiciles.

TETHYS

I thought he was a young man?

ELIZABETH

(ignoring her)

One of the small ones will do fine.

Aaron starts to go.

ELIZABETH

And guards. Posted outside of his door, armed, until we see him off tomorrow.

Tethys furrows her brow, as if she wants to question this order, but she holds back. Aaron nods and disappears.

ELIZABETH

(coldly)

You have the morning guard to attend to, I believe.

Elizabeth disappears around a corner. Tethys watches her go for a beat before turning to leave.

The PALE MAN stands behind her. Still as the grave.

Tethys starts when she sees him, but she does not appear shocked. Recognition on her face--sadness as well. She furrows her brow but does not look away.

After a moment, he steps aside, allowing her to pass. Tethys walks forward, her gait steady.

She does not look back.

TITLE OVER BLACK:

iii. Dark Magic

INT. CASTLE NOCTURNE - LIBRARY - MAIN HALL - DAY

A row of books on a shelf. Mystical, mysterious sounding titles--"The Fourth Mystics War: an Oral History", "Azoth's Almanac of the Otherworldly", "Dark Portals and Darker Worlds: A Cynic's Map of the Known Realms".

A hand reaches up, grasping at the covers. It grips the binding of the almanac and pulls it from its shelf.

MATTHIAS flips through the book at the top of a tall ladder. Behind him rows and rows of books stretch off into the distance--a vast, seemingly endless trove of knowledge.

Behind him, one of the enormous wooden doors creaks open. A blurry figure enters the library, looks left, right, then catches sight of him.

TETHYS

Matthias!

Matthias jumps, nearly falling off his ladder. He huffs in annoyance and descends.

MATTHIAS

Ah. Lady Tethys, and twice in one day! To what do I owe the honor?

TETHYS

Such a formal greeting. I appreciate it.

Matthias reaches the floor and shakes the stiffness from his legs. He moves slowly, his body and movements showing his age.

MATTHIAS

Ah, yes. You are referring to my...dig at Elizabeth this morning.

TETHYS

She'll survive, I expect. Still, it wasn't kind.

MATTHIAS

Yes, yes, I'll apologize...at some point.

He hobbles past Tethys toward a long table with a stack of books. The area is set up for research: a sheet of parchment, an inkwell, a quill pen, a tumble of scrolls. Tethys follows.

MATTHIAS

She's been getting so *snooty* lately.

TETHYS

Well she's under a lot of pressure--

Matthias drops the book onto the table with a loud SMACK. He pulls himself into a chair, then opens the book and dabs his pen into its well.

MATTHIAS

How does she expect people to treat her like a commander if she's always behaving like an insecure little--

TETHYS

If you're quite finished insulting my partner, Matthias, I did not come to gossip.

Matthias stops just as he is about to make a note, his quill hovering over the parchment.

MATTHIAS

Business, then? You seek
my counsel?

TETHYS

The boy this morning--did he tell
you why he'd come to the castle?

Matthias sets his quill back into the inkwell.

MATTHIAS

I didn't ask. I simply performed
my spells and checks, as Her
Majesty the Stewardess requested.

TETHYS

(ignoring his jab)
The boy has requested aid for the
village of Noor.

Matthias raises an eyebrow.

MATTHIAS

And what aid has he requested?

TETHYS

They've found a body. And they
want us to investigate.

MATTHIAS

Hmm. I take it this was not your
average corpse?

TETHYS

The way he described it...got
under my skin. I just want to make
sure we don't let something
dangerous get past us.

Matthias looks at her. Senses the fear in her voice.

MATTHIAS

Very well. OLIVIA!

The sudden shout makes Tethys jump. Matthias looks past
Tethys, craning his neck. She follows his gaze.

OLIVIA

(off-screen)
One moment, Maester!

A sound of papers rustling and books clunking to the ground.

OLIVIA
(off-screen)
Fuck! I--one moment!

MATTHIAS
I swear, that girl.

TETHYS
Cut her some slack. She'll
get there.

Matthias raises an eyebrow at Tethys, but he doesn't respond.

The sound of sandals flopping against the floor. OLIVIA (14), perpetually wet- and wide-eyed, finally appears, rounding one of the stacks at a run. She carries a pile of haphazardly stacked books, corners of parchment peeking between covers.

She catches sight of Tethys and stops short, nearly dropping her books.

OLIVIA
Lady Tethys!

Tethys smiles a big, dumb smile, the kind reserved for adorable children.

TETHYS
It's good to see you, Olivia.

Olivia stares for a moment, then remembers herself and rushes over.

OLIVIA
I haven't seen you in ages.

TETHYS
It's been maybe a week.

Olivia looks sheepish. Tethys is clearly her idol.

MATTHIAS
Hmph.

Olivia bows slightly to Matthias, books still in arm.

OLIVIA
I apologize, Maester. How may I be
of service?

MATTHIAS
We're investigating a murder.

Olivia's eyes bulge. Tethys hits Matthias on the shoulder.

MATTHIAS

What? We don't get much excitement in the library, if I don't spice things up now and then you'll find me one morning rotting under a pile of parchment.

(to Olivia)

Please, my girl, fetch a copy of--

He breaks off, unsure.

MATTHIAS

Perhaps a description of the body would be in order?

TETHYS

It wasn't just the body, though that was part of it. What really disturbed me was the way he described the feeling of being near it.

Matthias's eyes narrow.

TETHYS

He described it as...as feeling like the air he breathed was turning rotten inside him. Like he was decaying from the inside, and he couldn't move. He said his whole body was heavy--and he said everyone else in the village felt the same way.

Olivia looks frightened. Matthias looks instantly concerned.

TETHYS

Sorry, I know that's not much to go off of.

MATTHIAS

Well. We'll just have to...do our best. It certainly sounds like a curse of some sort. Olivia, could you fetch a copy of--

OLIVIA

What did the body look like?

Matthias shoots Olivia a questioning look.

TETHYS

It was partially rotted, though the girl had only been missing a couple of days.

(MORE)

TETHYS (CONT'D)

And she was somewhat burned--

OLIVIA

I know what it is.

(to Matthias)

I'm sorry if I'm out of turn,
Maester, but I've been doing some
reading, looking into....

She trails off at Matthias's disapproving look.

Tethys puts a hand on Olivia's shoulder and shoots Matthias a
withering glance.

TETHYS

It's all right. I'm listening.

Olivia smiles. They share a moment. Matthias seethes.

OLIVIA

How much do you know about
dark magic?

INT. CASTLE LIBRARY - ANNEX ENTRANCE - DAY

Complete darkness. The creaking of a door opening, and then--

OLIVIA

(in Elvish)

V-velca.

A beat. Nothing happens.

OLIVIA

Sorry--I'm not very good, I've
been practicing, but--

TETHYS

(calmly)

It's alright. Take your time.

OLIVIA

Ok. Right.
(deep breath)
Velca.

Flames burst from torches hanging on either side of the door,
illuminating Tethys and Olivia in orange light.

One by one, torches ignite along the walls, magical flames
chaining up the aisles, revealing:

THE ANNEX--the dark, musty cousin to the library's
upper floor.

Rows and rows of shelves covered with dusty piles of scrolls, parchments, books, and mystical artifacts.

OLIVIA

Have you ever been down here?

Tethys shakes her head.

OLIVIA

There are scrolls down here that are as old as Castle Nocturne. But no one comes down here anymore, other than the Maester...and me.

Slightly later. Olivia reaches up to a shelf and pulls down a scroll. She tucks it into a pile of scrolls already in her arms. Tethys looks on, curious.

Olivia drops the pile onto a table and begins unspooling some of them. After a moment Tethys reaches forward to help. We stay on the two of them as they work and talk.

OLIVIA

There used to be...
(searching for the
right word)
...attacks on the villages nearest
to the Darklands.

TETHYS

It wasn't that long before my time here, Olivia.

OLIVIA

Well, while the attacks were happening, the druids of Castle Nocturne kept notes. After the war was won and the attacks stopped, most of the records were moved down here.

Olivia smooths one final scroll on the table and stops--she's found what she was looking for.

OLIVIA

Not every attack was the same--sometimes there were monsters, sometimes plagues. But one of the attacks that recurred was...

Angle on: DRAWINGS, disturbing images of ROTTING CORPSES. They're sketched in a variety of mediums: charcoal, pencil, one an elaborate painting, all frightening...and familiar.

TETHYS

You come down her to read
these...for fun?

OLIVIA

I-I...like reading, I guess.

Tethys gapes at the images. She shuffles through them, picking one up for a closer look. Tethys knows--this is what happened to the girl in her vision.

OLIVIA

Most bodies were found shortly
after disappearing, usually within
a couple days, sometimes within
hours. They were always
found...like this. The druids
never fully worked out the origin
of the...condition, but someone
did name it.

Olivia pushes some pictures out of the way, then taps a finger on the corner of one of the sketches.

In boldly etched block letters: THE ROT.

MATTHIAS

(off-screen)

Not someone. Me.

Olivia and Tethys both turn. Matthias stands at the other end of the table, looking frustrated.

MATTHIAS

The Rot disappeared with the other
aberrations at the end of the war.
You know our history, Tethys.

He hobbles forward slowly, then brushes some of the pictures away, searching. He pulls a drawing from the stack, eyes it, then passes it to Tethys.

MATTHIAS

And you know what finally
stopped them.

CLOSE ON: An elaborate sketch of a wave of MONSTERS and MYTHICAL BEASTS facing down an army. A LONG-HAIRED KNIGHT stands, sword extended, at the army's head.

TETHYS

(off-screen)

Of course I do.

Suddenly, the sketch COMES TO LIFE. The battle begins moving on the page as we move into the scene.

We hear the sounds of WAR: clanging steel, screams of dying soldiers, roars of monsters.

The sketched figures of soldiers rush towards a fearsome, shadowy beast. The beast lets out a primal SCREECH. Several soldiers cower at the noise. A couple brave figures rush forward--they are immediately slashed aside, batted away like flies.

The Knight does not cower. She steps forward, sword drawn, and raises it to the sky. LIGHT begins shining from the sword's point like some sort of divine blessing.

She charges forward, her army at her back. She lets out a full-throated BATTLE CRY, then LEAPS INTO THE AIR, arcing her sword downward.

Off the Knight's sketched, rage-filled features to:

INT. CASTLE NOCTURNE - STUDY - DAY

CLOSE ON: Elizabeth's face.

BLACKWELL

(off-screen)

Would you say your tenure as
Stewardess has gone smoothly?

Elizabeth sits in an armchair in the study--the same study where she will later spy on Mr. Blackwell's interrogation. Her legs are crossed. She looks calculating.

ELIZABETH

I would say so.

Mr. Blackwell sits across the room at a writing desk covered in parchment and books.

BLACKWELL

How so?

ELIZABETH

Troop morale has been--

BLACKWELL

You were not assigned as a
military leader, Stewardess. You
have...Lady Tethys for that.

(Beat.)

I am asking about your governance.

Elizabeth blinks, her gaze fixed and hard to read.

BLACKWELL

Of course the King appreciates that his subjects along the eastern border are no longer in danger of being violently killed by arcane creatures. But we are concerned about the day to day rule in the eastern province.

ELIZABETH

I brought this province back to life.

BLACKWELL

And that ought not be overlooked.

A beat. Mr. Blackwell stands from his desk, pulling a piece of parchment from the stack.

BLACKWELL

I read your service records.

ELIZABETH

And?

Mr. Blackwell walks out from behind his desk as he speaks.

BLACKWELL

Born in the northern provinces, enlisted at age 15. Rose rapidly through the ranks, high enough to convince the King to mount a bold--and risky--offensive campaign. A genuine war hero who could have had her choice of assignment. And you chose...Castle Nocturne.

ELIZABETH

This is where the trouble was.

BLACKWELL

A cynic would say this is where you'd find the greatest opportunity for advancement.

Elizabeth's face is pure loathing.

ELIZABETH

Your point?

BLACKWELL

Since you were granted this stewardship, the province has advanced.

(MORE)

BLACKWELL (CONT'D)

Life expectancy has increased, morale, as you have kindly noted, has improved. But you are not of noble birth, and there are some at court who feel the position requires more...formality.

Blackwell stops in front of Elizabeth's chair. He lifts his eye from the parchment in his hands.

ELIZABETH

Are you questioning my pedigree?

Mr. Blackwell passes the parchment to her. At the top can be read: LADY TETHYS OF NOCTURNE, KNIGHT COMMANDER.

BLACKWELL

I'm questioning your priorities.

A knock at the door. Before Elizabeth can fully stand, Mr. Blackwell crosses the study and pulls it open.

Tethys stands in the hallway, looking serious and formal.

TETHYS

Mr. Blackwell. I...apologize for the interruption.

INT. CASTLE NOCTURNE - STUDY DOOR - DAY

In the hall outside the study, Elizabeth swings the door shut and turns to face Tethys.

ELIZABETH

I swear, Tethys--

TETHYS

I think we should send a team to Noor.

Elizabeth's eyes widen.

ELIZABETH

Excuse me?

TETHYS

I spoke with Matthias and I think--

ELIZABETH

I gave you an order, Tethys.

Elizabeth looks as if she might explode.

She glances back at the study door--*Blackwell is inside*--then begins to storm down the hallway.

Tethys follows, persistent.

TETHYS

We can't wait on this one, love--

ELIZABETH

Gods--could you at least pretend to be formal?

TETHYS

Sorry. Then please consider this a formal request from the Knight Commander of your guard.

Elizabeth rounds a corner and stops short. Tethys nearly runs into her.

ELIZABETH

I ordered you to leave it be and you disobeyed. A *direct order*, Tethys.

TETHYS

I was...trusting my instincts.
(Beat.)
Ma'am.

ELIZABETH

(hurt)
Well why can't you trust mine?

Tethys looks like she's been slapped. In a moment of silence, Elizabeth swallows her emotions--her face goes cold.

ELIZABETH

You can have a team. I'm assigning you to lead it.

TETHYS

Excuse me?

ELIZABETH

You can have your pick of a soldiers. But keep it small, we can't spare a large unit on a wild goose chase.

She turns and starts to go. Tethys starts to follow.

TETHYS

I'm not an investigator. And I have responsibilities here--

ELIZABETH

You are hereby relieved of those responsibilities. I will assign a deputy to cover your duties until such time--

TETHYS

Lizzie--

ELIZABETH

Stop.

Elizabeth stops walking. Tethys grabs her by the shoulder, trying to turn Elizabeth around, but she doesn't budge.

ELIZABETH

Go build a team. Take the boy and leave first thing in the morning. Those are your orders.

She pulls free from Tethys' grip and takes a few steps away.

ELIZABETH

And...maybe it's best if you find somewhere else to sleep tonight.

Hold on Elizabeth's face. There's something there--regret? fear? doubt?--and then she stalks off. Tethys watches her go, devastated.

TITLE OVER BLACK:

iv. Team Building

EXT. CASTLE NOCTURNE - GARDENS - DAY

Rows of smooth stones, laid out in aesthetic patterns and scattered across the ground--were we to view this scene from above, we might see the stones resemble the runes on Dorcas' arms. A thin fog hovers over the area--ominous, but peaceful.

Tethys walks a path through the stones towards a wooden platform at the garden's center. DORCAS sits cross-legged on the platform, eyes shut, breathing deeply.

His TATTOOS glow strangely as he meditates.

TETHYS

Dorcas?

He opens one eye. His tattoos fade. He shuts his eye again, annoyed.

DORCAS

Teth, do you know what time of month it is?

TETHYS

The full moon was yesterday.

DORCAS

And you know I need to meditate the day *before* and *after* if I want to avoid--

TETHYS

Yes, I know.

DORCAS

And still you're here, disturbing me.

TETHYS

We have a job.

This intrigues him. He opens one eye.

DORCAS

We haven't had a mission in...

TETHYS

Couple years. Give or take a month or two.

DORCAS

You need the wolf?

TETHYS

No. Maybe. Probably not, though.

He opens his eyes fully. He eyes her with suspicion, then shrugs and nods.

DORCAS

Fine. I'm in. Anything else?

TETHYS

Where does Kira usually go after her morning training?

INT. CASTLE NOCTURNE - ELLIOT'S CHAMBERS - DAY

Elliot sits on the edge of the bed, hands folded, lost in thought. He stares at his own reflection in a MIRROR, a twin to the mirror in the study.

A knock on the door--he doesn't respond.

The door creaks opens and he bolts to his feet. We see, only for a moment, that the reflection doesn't stand, it merely turns its head.

ELLIOT

Who's there?

Tethys peeks around the door. He relaxes slightly.

ELLIOT

Lady Tethys, ma'am, I--oh, thank you for coming, please do come in, I'm sorry if I'm a bit...jumpy.

Tethys enters, followed by KIRA. Kira looks curious but wary.

TETHYS

I understand. But you have nothing to fear here, Elliot.

ELLIOT

I believe you, ma'am, but...there's guards outside my door. And no one will tell me--Gee wiz, is that an elf?

Kira looks at Tethys and mouths: *Gee wiz?* Tethys smiles. Elliot continues unfazed.

ELLIOT

I've never seen one in person, I've only heard--Are all elves this pretty?--Oh, I'm being rude, I'm sorry, I've just been jumpy, see, since I got here, and I keep getting taken from room to room and no one will tell me what's going on or where I'm going next, but if I don't head home soon my father is sure to be awful--

KIRA

Is he always like this?

TETHYS

Elliot, this is Kira. She'll be accompanying us on the journey back to Noor.

ELLIOT

Back to...our request for aid has been granted?

TETHYS

That it has.

ELLIOT

(beaming)

Oh, I was worried you wouldn't take me serious, and I--

KIRA

Tethys, we'll be here all day.

TETHYS

Patience.

Elliot sits back on the bed, looking sheepish.

ELLIOT

I can talk a bit when I get excited. Or nervous. Or... sorry.

TETHYS

I've tasked Kira with keeping an eye on you during the journey. I thought, given your ages you might get along better than the rest of the team.

Kira looks as if this thought is a grave insult.

ELLIOT

Team--I don't want to make a big fuss, ma'am. How many will be joining us?

TETHYS

I still have a few more to talk with. We'll have to see.

Elliot jumps to his feet and gives an awkward bow.

ELLIOT

I am in your debt, Lady Tethys.

Tethys smiles warmly at him. A moment of silence passes, then she nudges Kira with her elbow. Reluctantly, Kira steps forward and extends her hand.

KIRA

Kira. I look forward to getting to know you, Elliot.

ELLIOT

(blurts out)

Do elves really grow from vines?

Kira shoots a glare to Tethys: *Do I have to?*

INT. CASTLE NOCTURNE - ELLIOT'S DOOR - DAY

Tethys closes the door to Elliot's room. Two guards flank the door. Tethys nods to them--*as you were*. She takes a deep breath, takes two steps, then stops short, sensing something.

In the shadows, just beyond the door and just at the edge of the sunlight coming from the window, something stirs.

TETHYS

Lyn. We need to have a word.

The shadows shift and reveal the cloaked form of Lyndis. She steps into the light.

LYNDIS

Lady Tethys.

TETHYS

What do you want here, Lyndis?

LYNDIS

To know your intent.

TETHYS

Excuse me?

LYNDIS

You sense something wrong in the boy's story, do you not?

TETHYS

Is that why you pulled that stunt this morning? Thanks for that, by the way.

LYNDIS

You are welcome.

TETHYS

You are infuriating.

Tethys turns on her heel and walks in the opposite direction down the hall. We follow as she walks. The guards share a glance as she passes.

Tethys rounds a corner and finds herself face to face with Lyndis once again. Tethys flinches.

TETHYS

Fuck, Lyn--can't you just *walk* like a fucking normal human person?

LYNDIS

You need to listen to me.

TETHYS

I'm your superior officer, I don't need to do anything.

LYNDIS

I looked at his aura.

TETHYS

Lyn, you can't just--
(considering this)
What did you see?

LYNDIS

Nothing.

TETHYS

Nothing?

LYNDIS

Nothing. Where his emotions ought have been, I saw a void.

Tethys furrows her brow in concern.

TETHYS

Are your powers working right?

Lyndis draws back into the shadows, then reappears behind Tethys' left shoulder. Tethys does not jump this time.

LYNDIS

I sense compassion for the boy. A fluttering of wariness--you can tell that something is wrong, but you are unsure of the correct path. And--fear. You fear me. You fear lost love. You fear the darkness that lurks in that room--

Tethys begins to walk away. Lyndis follows.

TETHYS

Ok, so they work. What could block you?

LYNDIS

Magic.
(clarifying)
Dark magic.

TETHYS

...You want me to call off
the mission.

LYNDIS

For a start. But you won't.

TETHYS

But I won't.
(Beat.)
Why did you call for me, Lyndis?

LYNDIS

By my observation I thought the
situation could use a...discerning
eye.

TETHYS

Elizabeth could have handled it.

LYNDIS

This castle is a place of magic,
Tethys. It is best that we not
tell lies.

Tethys crosses her arms.

TETHYS

You're coming with us?

LYNDIS

If you will not call off this
errand--yes. I wish to monitor
him.

TETHYS

Fine.

LYNDIS

You do not object?

TETHYS

That is what "fine" means.

Lyndis begins to retreat into the shadows.

TETHYS

Wait.

Lyndis stops, her body half in, half out of the darkness.

TETHYS

I need you to do something for me.

CLOSE ON: Tethys' face, resolute.

INT. CASTLE NOCTURNE - LIBRARY STACKS - DAY

CLOSE ON: Olivia's face, shocked, nervous, and excited all at once. Ink smeared on the side of her face.

OLIVIA

Me?

Wider on: Olivia, at the top of a ladder, reaching for a book on a shelf just out of reach.

TETHYS

Yes, you.

OLIVIA

(straining for the book)

On a field mission?

TETHYS

Yes, that is what I said.

OLIVIA

Like...in the field?

TETHYS

It's not a combat mission. You won't be expected to do any daring deeds, but you clearly know the most about what we're looking for.

OLIVIA

But we don't even know if I'm--Oh, for heaven's sake.

(loudly)

Eight shelves up, one over, fifth from the left!

The book quivers for a moment, budging just slightly. Olivia sighs.

OLIVIA

Eight shelves up, one shelf right, fifth from the left!

The book quivers more, moves an inch outwards, but doesn't come down.

OLIVIA

I swear, the magic in this place.
 (loudly, enunciating
 precisely)
 Eight. Shelves. Up. One. Shelf.
 Right. Fifth. From. The. Left.

The book ROCKETS from its place, ricocheting off the shelves across the aisle and tumbling down towards Tethys' head. Tethys jumps to the side, but the book stops abruptly, hovering right at her eye level.

OLIVIA

Sorry! Oh, Lady Tethys, I'm--

TETHYS

It's fine, Olivia.

Olivia climbs down quickly as she speaks.

OLIVIA

The enchantments in the stacks have needed to be redone for decades, they're finicky and old and I just haven't been able to find the time...

She snatches the book from the air as her feet touch the ground. Tethys puts a hand on her shoulder.

TETHYS

I want you to come with us.

OLIVIA

I'm not...I'm not an expert, Lady Tethys. But I appreciate you...thinking of me.

Olivia walks from the aisle and towards the lines of tables, where Matthias sits, poring over old rolls of parchment. Tethys follows.

OLIVIA

I wouldn't know--I haven't finished my casting practicum yet, and I'm barely versed in *light* magic, let alone *dark*.

TETHYS

But you've spent time researching the...Rot.

Olivia stops a few steps from the table. Matthias looks up at her, raising an eyebrow. She finishes walking and sets the book on Matthias' stack.

OLIVIA

Yes. I suppose I have.

TETHYS

And would you recognize the evidence of it? If you saw it in the field.

OLIVIA

I...might. But another pair of eyes would...

She looks to Matthias sheepishly. He looks up, waits for a beat, then realizes what Olivia is implying.

MATTHIAS

No.

OLIVIA

Sir, please--

MATTHIAS

I haven't been an adventurer in years, Tethys. And I have far too much on my plate--

(to Olivia)

You have far too much on your plate!

TETHYS

We would be back in a week, at the longest.

MATTHIAS

You're dragging me on a murder investigation and you expect it to only take a week?

TETHYS

So you'll come?

Matthias jams his quill in its inkwell. Olivia's eyes, wide and expectant. He softens.

MATTHIAS

It will be good for your training, I suppose.

Olivia brightens.

OLIVIA

Oh, thank you Maester, you won't regret this!

MATTHIAS

I'll have to fish out my axes from
wherever they're buried.

OLIVIA

They're in the back office,
hanging in the back cupboard.

Matthias eyes her suspiciously.

OLIVIA

My apologies, Maester.
(softer)
They're really cool.

Off Olivia's sheepish grin to:

INT. CASTLE NOCTURNE - ELLIOT'S CHAMBERS - AFTERNOON

CLOSE ON: Kira's face, smiling just slightly. In the
background a boisterous laughter.

PULL OUT TO REVEAL Elliot, sitting next to her on the bed,
grinning ear to ear. Kira is smiling in spite of herself--
Elliot's joy is infectious.

ELLIOT

But then, you're only a child!

KIRA

I'm older than you.

ELLIOT

Sure, in human years, but in
elf years--

KIRA

I am three years older than you!

ELLIOT

In *elf* years you're barely a
toddler, if that!

KIRA

You want a toddler to kick
your ass?

ON THE WALL: The mirror blinks once with a flash of light.

Both Elliot and Kira jump, startled. The mirror blinks again,
then a message swims onto the cloudy glass, ornate letters
wreathed in light:

1ST FLOOR STUDY. 1 HOUR.

INT. CASTLE NOCTURNE - LIBRARY - MAIN HALL - LATE DAY

At his research desk, Matthias scribbles notes on parchment, occasionally glancing at an open book.

Behind him, Olivia darts back and forth, in and out of the frame, holding various books and scrolls.

OLIVIA
The Book of Maladies?

MATTHIAS
(not listening)
Sure.

OLIVIA
I have the Dead Walk Scrolls, in case you were looking for them.

MATTHIAS
Thank you.

OLIVIA
Arctus' Fourth Treatise on Unexplained Magicks?

MATTHIAS
Of course.

OLIVIA
Do you think--

The GIANT MIRROR above the doors blinks with light, just as the mirror in Elliot's Room. Olivia stops short, a scroll or two tumbling from the pile she's carrying.

Matthias turns around just in time to see the same message blink onto the mirror:

1ST FLOOR STUDY. 1 HOUR.

INT. CASTLE NOCTURNE - DORCAS' DEN - LATE DAY

A small, sparse room: a thin mattress without a frame, a desk and dresser tucked into the corner. On the walls, runes like those on Dorcas' arms are painted in black, and a MIRROR, the same type we've seen before.

Dorcas, shoeless and shirtless, does one-arm push-ups on the floor--the arm doing the heavy lifting is bulging and covered with FUR. On his other, still-human arm, the runes glow WHITE.

The mirror BLINKS TO LIFE and he lifts himself from the ground to read it. We see his upper body, nearly hairless, is covered in winding tracks of those same glowing runes.

INT. CASTLE NOCTURNE - HALLWAYS - LATE DAY

A seemingly empty hallway. The sun has begun to set--orange light comes in through large windows. Shadows sit in the gaps between the windows.

On the wall, a MIRROR blinks to life, the message slowly appearing on its glass--but for whom?

The shadows part and out steps LYNDIS. She reads the words for a beat.

LYNDIS

Hmm.

She slips backwards into the shadows.

INT. CASTLE NOCTURNE - STUDY - NIGHT

CLOSE ON: A flickering fire.

TETHYS

(off-screen)

The journey will take us roughly a day and a half.

We see the team assembled: Lyndis in the corner, partly in shadow; Matthias in the armchair, with Olivia perched on one of the arms; Elliot on the floor, legs crossed; and Kira sitting backwards in a small chair, her arms draped over the chair's back.

TETHYS

(off-screen)

This is Noor.

CLOSE ON: Tethys' finger taps at a point on a map. NOOR is written over a small dot. A set of wavy terrain lines surround the dot on three sides. Tethys drags her finger to the west of the dot, going through a forest, stopping at a drawing of a fort labeled CASTLE NOCTURNE.

TETHYS

We'll travel most of the distance on the first day, and make camp--
(indicating on the map)
--here. At the edge of the wood.

PULL OUT TO REVEAL: Tethys stands to the right on a large map of the kingdom, mounted on the wall. Dorcas stands on the other side of the map, strong and silent, arms crossed.

Tethys looks firm and resolute: she's in leadership mode.

TETHYS

Most of you have been past or through Noor before, but for those who haven't--

She indicates the terrain lines around Noor.

TETHYS

--All of this is marshland. It can be slow-going if you don't know the way through, so I'm happy we have a local with us.

She gives Elliot a warm smile. He grins. Lyndis gives him a withering sideways glance that he completely misses. Kira notices it, but says nothing.

TETHYS

We don't know exactly what we're looking for, so until we get a better sense of it we travel smart. Dorcas and I will travel at the head of the pack, and Lyndis will guard from the shadows. Kira, stick with Elliot as his personal guard. Matthias, I know you're over the hill--

MATTHIAS

Finish that sentence at your own risk, milady.

TETHYS

But I trust you can look out for Olivia on the journey.

MATTHIAS

Of course.

Tethys looks to the rest of the group.

TETHYS

I want to make something clear. I don't expect this mission to be dangerous.

INT. CASTLE NOCTURNE - LIBRARY - OFFICE - NIGHT

The open doors of a CABINET in Matthias' office. Hanging on hooks in the back are two HAND AXES, ornately decorated, with runes forged into the metal.

Matthias reaches in, taking one axe in each hand. He tests their weight, gives them a twirl around his fingers. His muscles remember how to wield them.

TETHYS (VO)

I expect us to go in, investigate,
and report back. I'm not expecting
us to find a fight.

INT. CASTLE NOCTURNE - LIBRARY - GRAND HALL - NIGHT

Olivia stuffs several books and scrolls into a large rucksack.
Her hand lingers on one book: A BEGINNERS GUIDE TO MYSTIC
COMBAT: LIGHT EDITION, VOL. 3

TETHYS (VO)

But I could be wrong. The journey
become dangerous. Things might get
messy.

INT. CASTLE NOCTURNE - DORCAS' DEN - NIGHT

CLOSE ON: The curtains to Dorcas' portal window. His hands
reach up and quickly open them, revealing: the FULL MOON.

The moonlight hits Dorcas and he shivers. Brown hair starts to
grow on his hands. He takes a deep breath and it recedes. The
runes on his body light up where the moonlight touches them.

He sits in the middle of the floor, legs crossed, directly in
the moonlight's path, and begins to meditate. His runes pulse
with his deep breathing--in, out, in, out.

TETHYS (VO)

I trust every single person in
this room. If I didn't trust you,
you'd be staying behind. I trust
you to take care of yourselves,
and to take care of each other.

Sound match from Dorcas' breathing to:

INT. CASTLE NOCTURNE - LYNDIS' CHAMBERS - NIGHT

The slicing sound of steel being sharpened, in time with
Dorcas' breaths.

In a dark, dusty room with no windows, Lyndis sits in the
corner on a wicker chair. Lit candles flicker around the room.

Methodically, with deliberate strokes, she sharpens a small
CURVED SICKLE. The blade's sister sits on an end table to her
left.

TETHYS (VO)

We leave tomorrow morning. We watch each others backs. We investigate. And then we return, in tact, as a team.

INT. CASTLE NOCTURNE - STUDY - NIGHT

The team. Their faces as serious as their leaders. As Tethys continues, the camera ZOOMS IN slowly, coming in on ELLIOT'S FACE.

TETHYS

Any other result would be a total mission failure. Go to your rooms, pack, and get some rest. We leave at dawn.

Camera rests on ELLIOT'S EYE. A DARK SHIMMER runs across the white of his eye, fading back to white as we cut to:

INT. CASTLE NOCTURNE - HALLWAYS - NIGHT

The dark, torch-lit hallways.

Empty. Lifeless.

TITLE OVER BLACK:

v. Omen

INT. CASTLE NOCTURNE - CASTLE BATHS - NIGHT

In a large, torch-lit room, Tethys sits in a bathtub as two servants, one male, one female, take turns gently scrubbing her arms. They pamper her, pouring water over her, rinsing away the suds.

Tethys barely notices them. Her eyes still and forward and straight.

She might as well be in another world.

One of the servants pours water over Tethys' head and her hair collapses over her shoulders and face. One eye stares between a gap in the strands. Then another pour, and her hair completely eclipses her face.

INT. CASTLE NOCTURNE - TETHYS' QUARTERS - NIGHT

Tethys lies on what would--if she was with Elizabeth--be her side of the bed. Her arm is stretched out, wrapped around the shoulders of a body that isn't there.

Her eyes flicker closed. Then--

EXT. FIELD - DAY

On a stone bench in the center of a bright, sunny field, Tethys sits with a PRETTY YOUNG GIRL.

Both face forward. Not looking at each other. Stock still.

PRETTY GIRL
Do you know who I am?

TETHYS
You died. Didn't you?

PRETTY GIRL
No. But they thought I did.

The girl turns her head towards Tethys. As she speaks, her body FLICKERS and FLASHES between states. One moment she is alive--the next she is ROTTED. Burnt.

Very, very dead.

PRETTY/ROTTED GIRL
I don't think I want you to come find me. I think I want you to stay right where you are. I think I want you to never wake up. I think I want you to take a deep breath and then never breathe again. I think I want you to taste blood and fire and metal cutting through your throat, and when that's done I think I want to claim your body as my property and wear it like a costume.

Then Tethys is standing.

Alone.

The field is no longer full of life--like the girl, it is DEAD and BURNT, the grass replaced with a field of ASHES and DIRT.

Tethys stands at the center of the clearing.

Off in the distance, at the edge of the clearing, there sits a large stone ALTAR. Mounted on the altar is the girl, PRETTY once again, eyes staring coldly at Tethys across the dirt.

PRETTY GIRL

You can look away if you want.

She BURSTS INTO FLAMES. She does not scream.

Tethys does not look away. She stares with horror, transfixed.

TETHYS

This is a dream.

And then she is surrounded--by the girl, in her three forms: the BURNING GIRL, still aflame; the ROTTED GIRL, blackened and mangled; the PRETTY GIRL, adorable, grinning like a monster.

BURNING GIRL

This is not a dream.

TETHYS

I need to wake up.

ROTTED GIRL

You will never wake up.

TETHYS

None of this is real.

PRETTY GIRL

This is not a dream.

And suddenly it's all gone--the field, the girls, the fire--replaced with a dark black void. Tethys floats, unmoored and alone, until--

The ROTTED GIRL appears, inches away from Tethys' face.

ROTTED GIRL

On second thought, please--come visit. We would love to have you.

The girl opens her rotted jaw and out pours a FLOOD of blackened BILE. It pulses at Tethys' face like a geyser, forcing its way down her throat, up her nose, into her eyes, into any hole it can reach--

With a loud, dry gasp, Tethys rises from her bed, clutching at her throat.

The room around her is still.

Her eyes are full of tears.

She is still alive.

BLACKWELL (VO)
And what did you do with
this omen?

INT. CASTLE NOCTURNE - HOLDING ROOM - NIGHT

Tethys sits across the table from Mr. Blackwell. She flicks her eyes towards him.

TETHYS
Excuse me?

BLACKWELL
After your...vision. What did you
do? How did you change your plans?

Tethys stares at him as if the question had never crossed her mind. A tear starts to form at the corner of her eye.

TETHYS
I--I don't...

BLACKWELL
What did you do *next*, Lady Tethys?

EXT. CASTLE NOCTURNE - GATES - DAY

Tethys' team exits through the castle gates in single file down a stone path, all on horseback except for Dorcas, who travels on foot.

Lyndis nods to Tethys, then sinks into the shadows under a tree near the path.

INT. CASTLE NOCTURNE - ELIZABETH'S CHAMBERS - DAY

From her window, Elizabeth watches the team's departure, arms crossed. Her face like stone.

EXT. CASTLE NOCTURNE - GATES - DAY

At the head of the line, Tethys glances back towards the castle, as if she can feel she is being watched. She looks concerned, disturbed, exhausted, almost as if she may consider turning back, calling off the operation.

Standing atop the battlements, she sees:

The PALE MAN on the PARAPET, red armor glistening in the morning sun.

Close on: his face, mournful. If he could cry, he might.

Tethys stares at his form for a beat. She takes a deep breath and turns away.

She leads the team over a hill. One by one they disappear from view, leaving Castle Nocturne looming ominously behind them.

FADE TO CREDITS