

MESSIAH

written by

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EXT. THE PURE WHITE SEA - YEAR 15 - DAY

A man stands on the surface of an endless ocean

A small boat with blue sails crests the horizon.

EXT. THE BOAT - YEAR 15 - DAY

The boat drifts, sails furled.

The man, KAI, 39, now sits on the edge of the boat, his back to the water. His greying beard is long, but not unkempt; his skin is leather.

Across from him sits AUGUST, not a day over 17. She wears her hair short, militarily practical. The sea hasn't ruined her skin yet, but she's got the tanned sunburn of a sailor.

Neither of them look happy.

AUGUST

It could be anyone.

KAI

It could be her.

August is cautious. Probing.

AUGUST

I thought you said she was dead.

KAI

I thought she was.

Beat.

KAI (CONT'D)

Damn it.

EXT. VARANGIAN TEMPLE OVERLOOK - YEAR 15 - NIGHT

Kai, August, and ERLING sit near the edge of the cliff, with a small fire for light.

Erling is an old salt, but with the weathering his skin has seen, it's hard to tell if he's 50 or 80. He wears his long white beard in an intricate braid.

KAI

Who brought the news?

ERLING
 Traders, soldiers, mercenaries...
 It's been trickling in for months.
 We only just put it all together.

KAI
 What do you think?

ERLING
 I think if it's not her, whoever it
 is has had training. This is no
 shaman dabbling in witchery.

KAI
 I need to send word to Bekter. His
 people are in danger, and-

ERLING
 It's too dangerous for a messenger,
 Kai. And for what? Bekter can read
 the signs as well as we can.
 Probably better. There's nothing we
 can warn him about that he doesn't
 already know.

Kai gets up, paces.

ERLING (CONT'D)
 The man's as good a leader as he is
 a fighter. He can handle himself.

Kai stops. Looks at Erling.

KAI
 Forget a messenger. You don't
 intend to send anyone.

Erling sighs.

ERLING
 At our peak, Kai, I don't know if
 we would've sent someone that far
 from the sea. We didn't send you,
 if you'll recall.

AUGUST
 But we could still go, right? Even
 if you don't send us?

Erling stumbles over his tongue.

ERLING
 I... you... that would be unwise,
 to be certain.

Kai shakes his head.

KAI
I don't think I could.

INT. KAI AND AUGUST'S ROOM - NIGHT

A lonely candle lights the spartan room. Kai lies on his back on a thin mattress on the floor; August sits on a matching one across the room.

AUGUST
You don't talk much about her.

Beat.

AUGUST (CONT'D)
She was a witch before, right? You and Erling hunted her?

Beat. Kai grunts.

AUGUST (CONT'D)
So it makes sense that she'd Ascend again.

KAI
She didn't Ascend.

August gives him a pitying look.

KAI (CONT'D)
The first time. She wasn't a witch yet. She hadn't Ascended.

AUGUST
Oh. But Erling said-

KAI
I love Erling like a father. But you listen to him too much.

August scowls.

AUGUST
Then give me something else to listen to! If not for him, I wouldn't have even known she existed!

Kai rolls over to look at August. She's not wrong, and he knows it.

KAI
 Nike was...

He rolls back, looks at the ceiling again.

Shadows, images of a girl with olive skin and dark black curls. She's screaming, laughing, fighting. We only get one good look at her - this is NIKE, 21, as Kai remembers her.

The images fade. Kai is overwhelmed, and August sees it.

KAI (CONT'D)
 (quiet)
 What have I done?

August pretends she didn't hear.

EXT. VARANGIAN TEMPLE - YEAR 15 - DAY

The temple is vast, open-air, filled with statues of gods and goddess of storms and sea. If there were more than a dozen people around, it would be impressive; as it is, it just looks abandoned.

August walks with GITTE, 30.

GITTE
 Kai was a private person even before... even before. He spent too much time with the Sukhe, if you ask me.

AUGUST
 But you do know what happened.

Gitte shrugs.

GITTE
 Stories about it. Honestly, August, I don't believe them enough to repeat them.

AUGUST
 Erling said Kai killed her because she Ascended.

Gitte cocks an eyebrow.

GITTE
 Did he.

AUGUST

A lot of people blame him for that, hey? Even though it probably didn't happen.

Gitte nods.

Beat.

AUGUST (CONT'D)

What was she like?

GITTE

Don't you think he's better equipped to answer that question?

August stares at her, waiting. Gitte sighs, and they continue walking.

NEARBY:

Kai and Erling stand at the overlook. Kai watches August and Gitte walk.

ERLING

Don't be an idiot, Kai. There's no good outcome from this.

Kai turns to Erling.

KAI

You'd really have me do nothing?

Erling sighs.

KAI (CONT'D)

Even if it weren't her. If it's not. I can't leave Bekter to face a witch like that all alone.

ERLING

He has as much experience with witches as any of us.

KAI

Erling, please.

Beat.

ERLING

Nobody should go with you.

Kai knows exactly which "nobody" he's referring to.

ERLING (CONT'D)
But damn it, boy, you'll need all
the help you can get. I'd be
nervous sending you back there even
without a witch.

Kai hesitates. Nods.

KAI
I'll talk to Gitte.

ERLING
She won't go. Ask Camillus. And
Erik. Lucia, perhaps.

Kai nods.

He looks at Erling, expectant.

ERLING (CONT'D)
Shit. No, don't even ask. Ten years
ago, perhaps.

Kai nods.

ERLING (CONT'D)
But do not take the girl.

KAI
She can handle it. She's ready.

Erling looks hard at Kai.

ERLING
Can you handle it? Are you ready?

Kai thinks. He looks over at August.

INT. WINE BAR - YEAR 15 - NIGHT

The bar is crowded and rowdy with drunks, gamblers, and
prostitutes.

Kai slides in past a couple kissing passionately in the
doorway. He surveys the area, displeased, as he makes his way
deeper inside.

August slides in after him, much more entertained by her
surroundings. She wanders over to a table of gamblers, but
Kai grabs her shoulder and pulls her away.

He keeps a firm grip on her as he keeps looking for...

ERIK, 28, in a corner booth, drinking and laughing with a few friends. His skin is almost as red as his hair.

Kai drags August over to the booth. Erik sees them, and breaks out in another bout of laughter.

ERIK

By Jupiter's bones! You're lost,
aren't you?

KAI

(drowned out by the noise)
We need to...

ERIK

What's that, man?

KAI

(louder)
We need to talk!

Erik shoos his friends from the booth, increasingly amused at this chain of events.

ERIK

Yeah, yeah! Come on, sit! Something
to drink?

KAI

No.

AUGUST

I'll have some!

Erik pours August a tall glass of wine. Kai glares, but doesn't stop him.

KAI

Could we go somewhere else?

ERIK

(as if he hadn't spoken)
So what did you want to talk about?

KAI

You were good friends with Nike.

Erik immediately deadens.

ERIK

Let's go somewhere else.

EXT. WINE BAR - YEAR 15 - NIGHT

The three of them stand out in the street, August still nursing her wine. The mood has taken a heavy shift towards dour.

ERIK

You can't honestly believe the rumors.

KAI

I can't afford not to.

ERIK

You told me she was dead. You said you watched her die.

KAI

It's been eight years, Erik. Two days ago, I would've sworn I had. Now, I don't know what I saw.

Beat. Erik paces.

ERIK

...Fuck! Why now? Why... Suppose you're right. Why wait until now to... do whatever she's doing. And why not just come home?

KAI

Those are the questions I want to find answers to.

Erik tears up. It doesn't look good on him.

ERIK

I don't think I can, Kai. If it is her. I don't think I'd be able to do it.

His words hit Kai like a brick; Kai's been trying to ignore that side of things.

KAI

We don't know that we'd need to do anything.

Erik gives Kai a look.

Beat.

ERIK

No. I won't. Even if it is her,
it's a bad idea to go that far from
the Sea. You were crazy to go out
there to begin with.

Beat.

ERIK (CONT'D)

And it's probably not her, anyway.

He clearly doesn't believe that.

Kai nods.

KAI

I understand. August.

She holds up her wine cup. Kai nods, and walks away.

August and Erik stand awkwardly for a long beat.

Erik coughs.

AUGUST

You were friends with Nike?

ERIK

It was a long time ago.

AUGUST

What was she like?

ERIK

Stereotypical Drachman. Dark hair,
really curly.

August perks up.

ERIK (CONT'D)

I didn't like her at first. Didn't
trust her.

His eyes glaze over. He's somewhere else, just for a beat.

ERIK (CONT'D)

Guess I was right.

He moves to go back inside.

AUGUST

Was it Kai's fault?

Erik freezes, turns around.

ERIK
(concerned)
Who told you that?

August shrugs.

AUGUST
He blames himself.

ERIK
I'm sure he does.

INT. KAI AND AUGUST'S ROOM - YEAR 15 - NIGHT

Kai and August are both asleep.

The door opens, and candlelight wakes Kai.

It's Erik.

ERIK
I'll come with you.

The door closes.

EXT. VARANGIAN TEMPLE - YEAR 15 - DAY

Kai and August sit on the front steps of the temple.

KAI
You don't have to come.

August gives Kai a look.

KAI (CONT'D)
You're almost finished with your
training. I could declare you
finished now. You could follow your
own path.

AUGUST
If you did, I'd just come with you
as a companion rather than an
apprentice.

Kai grimaces.

Beat.

KAI
I don't want you to come.

AUGUST

What?

KAI

Don't-

AUGUST

Why not? Why not?

KAI

(yelling)

The last time I went to the steppe,
I lost my apprentice!

Beat. Kai calms down.

KAI (CONT'D)

That's not gonna happen this time.

Kai can't look at her.

Beat.

AUGUST

You're gonna die out there. That's
why you don't want me to come.

Kai puts a hand on her shoulder.

KAI

It's a possibility. But it's not
the plan.

She nods.

AUGUST

Okay. Someone needs to keep an eye
on Erling, anyway.

She smiles. Kai smiles back.

They're sad smiles.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PATH - YEAR 7 - DAY

Kai, eight years and a century younger, rides through a small
valley. His beard is half the length it will be, and still
has all its color.

Nike rides next to him. She looks exactly like he remembered
her, if a little sad.

NIKE

Are we almost through the mountains?

KAI

Nike, it's been over a decade since I've ridden this path.

NIKE

I doubt it's changed much since then.

Kai laughs.

KAI

I'll be surprised if we're not through by the end of tomorrow.

Nike groans.

KAI (CONT'D)

It's not too late for you to turn around, you know.

Nike groans some more. Kai laughs.

KAI (CONT'D)

Once we're through the mountains, it should only be a month or so before we've reached Bekter's territory.

Nike's eyes bug out of her head. Kai laughs.

KAI (CONT'D)

But don't worry. Once we've reached his territory, it won't take us more than a couple weeks to find him.

Nike doesn't make a sound, she just turns her horse around and starts going the other way.

It takes Kai a moment to notice. When he does, he laughs.

KAI (CONT'D)

Hey! Get back here!

NIKE

You said I could still turn back!

KAI

I lied!

Nike sighs and turns back around.

LATER:

Sunset is still an hour away, but with the high walls on either side of them, it's getting dark fast.

Nike lingers a good fifty yards behind Kai - far enough that he rounds a corner and is completely out of her sight.

NIKE
(yelling)
Shouldn't we think about stopping
for the night?

Beat.

NIKE (CONT'D)
KAI!

Kai's voice echoes from around the corner.

KAI (O.S.)
Just a little farther!

NIKE
How much is a little?

Nike rounds the corner, revealing...

EXT. BREATHTAKING VISTA - CONTINUOUS

The entire steppe spills out into view. Rolling hills, endless meadows, and rushing rivers fade into a horizon bathed in red and gold.

Kai stands next to his horse, drinking it all in.

NIKE
(in awe)
Oh.

EXT. FOOTHILLS - YEAR 7 - DAY

Near the base of the mountains, Kai and Nike kneel next to each other, meditating.

Nike looks troubled.

Beat.

Nike sighs.

Beat.

Nike groans.

Kai opens his eyes.

KAI
Having trouble?

Nike doesn't open her eyes.

NIKE
No.

Kai waits for a beat.

Nike opens her eyes.

NIKE (CONT'D)
I don't understand. This isn't
normal. This isn't... What's
happening?

She pauses, as if waiting for an answer, but when Kai doesn't respond, she continues.

NIKE (CONT'D)
I don't feel... it feels like
something's wrong. Not with me.
With the world. With everything. I
thought it was just stress, or
excitement, but it's getting worse.

She looks at Kai. He's nonplussed.

NIKE (CONT'D)
Did you... is the same thing
happening to you?

Kai nods.

NIKE (CONT'D)
Why? What's going on?

KAI
You know everything you need to
know to figure it out.

Nike scowls, thinks.

KAI (CONT'D)
Right now, remember your
foundation. Follow your breath.

NIKE
I've been trying to! It isn't-

KAI
Breathe in slowly. Watch the
breath, listen to it, feel it fill
your chest.

Nike sighs, but closes her eyes and takes a deep breath.

KAI (CONT'D)
You're expecting too much. One
breath at a time.

She breathes out slowly, speaks by rote: this is a mantra.

NIKE
One breath at a time.

Kai watches for a beat, then closes his eyes, too.

EXT. STEPPE - YEAR 7 - DAY

Kai and Nike ride side by side along a small stream.

NIKE
It's the mountains. They're too-

KAI
No.

Nike grunts.

NIKE
Will it stop?

KAI
No.

Nike panics a little.

NIKE
Really? This is permanent? We're
just losing everything?

KAI
No.

Now she's just confused.

KAI (CONT'D)
Relax. Give yourself time to think
about it. What's happening?

NIKE

I'm losing my power. We're losing our power.

KAI

What is our power?

NIKE

It's a connection to... Oh. Oh!
It's the sea. The farther away we get from the sea, the less power we have!

Kai smiles, nods.

NIKE (CONT'D)

So when we go back, everything will be normal again?

KAI

Yes.

NIKE

But the further we go...

KAI

That too.

EXT. CANYON - YEAR -4 - DAY

Kai, here only 20, runs down the canyon faster than should be possible. His hair is short, and he's yet to grow a beard.

He leads three soldiers on horseback - one of whom is BEKTER, 20. Bekter is tall, muscular; he wears his dark hair in a pair of long braids.

Kai looks back - sees the dozen men who are chasing them. Who are gaining on them.

Kai reaches a narrow portion of the canyon, spins around, and draws his sword.

The soldiers stop their horses with him.

KAI

GO! You have to warn the centurion!

The soldiers look at him, then at each other.

BEKTER

But-

KAI

Go!

The other soldiers ride away. Bekter lingers a beat, then follows.

Lightning arcs across Kai's body, and fire fills his eyes.

ELSEWHERE:

Bekter and the other soldiers ride as hard as they can.

Bekter looks back. Lightning flashes up into the sky.

He stops. The other soldiers continue on.

Bekter curses under his breath.

BACK TO:

Kai is wounded. Blood runs down his left arm, and he stands favoring his left leg.

At his feet, though, lie six dead men, and five dead horses. Six more men stand around him, only four of them mounted.

One of the horsemen charges him; Kai throws a bolt of lightning at him, but the man ducks it.

The horseman tries to ride past Kai, but Kai rolls under the horse, cuts the saddle strap, and rips the saddle off, pulling the rider with it. He stabs the rider in the neck.

Then he's cut across the back by one of the other horsemen as he rides past and around the corner.

A scream comes from around the corner.

Kai and the enemy soldiers look back, all of them wary.

Bekter charges around the corner, sword out and bloodied. He screams a feral battle cry and charges.

EXT. WAR CAMP - YEAR -4 - DAY

Thousands of soldiers ready themselves for battle. The two horsemen that were with Kai and Bekter before talk to the commanding officer.

One HORSEMAN shakes his head, grim.

HORSEMAN

No. They sacrificed themselves so
that we could...

Shouts from the camp interrupt him. They look.

Kai, with a new gash across his forehead, rides Bekter's
horse into camp, with Bekter lying across the horse's back.

INT. MEDICAL TENT - EVENING

Bekter lies on a small cot, his numerous wounds bandaged.

Kai, wearing far fewer bandages, sits next to him.

Bekter stirs awake, and Kai gives him a waterskin before he
can ask for it.

Beat.

Kai takes the waterskin from him when he's finished.

Bekter examines Kai. Rolls his eyes.

BEKTER

(in broken English)

Why am I the people who saved your
life, but I am the people who is
hurt?

Kai shrugs.

KAI

I'm pretty good at what I do.

Bekter processes Kai's speech, then nods.

BEKTER

I am also pretty good. But I think
I am not so pretty good as you are.

KAI

You did save my life, you know.

BEKTER

I know.

KAI

Thank you.

Bekter smirks.

BEKTER
 (in Sukhe language)
 Not worth it.

KAI
 ...What?

BEKTER
 (in English)
 You are welcome.

EXT. EDGE OF THE CITY - YEAR 15 - MORNING

Kai, and Erik saddle their horses, while Erling puts some remaining supplies in their bags. August stands next to Kai.

Behind them lies a sprawling metropolis on an endless sea.

Ahead, towering mountains are painted orange by the rising sun.

Kai looks back at the sea. Erling follows his gaze.

ERLING
 You'll see it again.

Beat.

ERIK
 We leaving, or what?

Kai nods. He approaches Erling. They put their hands on each other's shoulders, press their foreheads together.

KAI
 My breath is yours.

ERLING
 My breath is yours.

They separate.

KAI
 We'll see you.

ERLING
 My prayers will line your path, and all that.

AUGUST
 Bye, Erik.

Erik taps his mouth, nose, and forehead; a sort of salute.

ERIK
For now, squiddie.

Erling nods to Erik as Erik mounts his horse.

ERLING
Stay in one piece.

ERIK
No promises.

Kai walks to August. They put their hands on each other's shoulders, press their foreheads together.

KAI
My breath is yours.

Beat. August struggles to keep it together.

KAI (CONT'D)
My breath is yours, August.

AUGUST
My breath is yours.

A quick embrace, then Kai mounts his horse.

Kai clicks to his horse, and heads towards the mountains.

EXT. TARGUID CAMP - YEAR 7 - EVENING

Kai and Nike crest a hill, and see a few gers - large white tents - scattered near a river. A dozen horses and twice as much cattle graze near the water.

In the center of the campsite, two dozen Sukhe men and women sit by a large campfire. All of them wear their hair in intricate braids, wrapped around their necks.

As soon as they notice Kai and Nike, the Sukhe rise and stare. Kai dismounts, and Nike follows his lead. They stand by their horses, unmoving, letting themselves be examined.

[The Sukhe all speak their own language, with subtitles]

SUKHE MAN
Who are you?

KAI
(in Sukhe language)
My name is Kai. This is my apprentice Nike. We are friends of Bekter Khan.

The Sukhe look suspicious.

SUKHE MAN
Bekter Khan has foreigner friends?

KAI
He has two.

Beat. The Sukhe deliberate.

NIKE
Is everything okay?

KAI
Everything is fine. They're just
not used to foreigners.

NIKE
Erik told me they wouldn't trust
us. He said the Sukhe eat
outsiders.

KAI
Not all of them.

NIKE
Do these ones?

KAI
Just try not to look tasty.

The Sukhe reach an agreement and invite Kai and Nike over.

He and Nike approach. Kai leads the horses to the other
horses, while Nike sits at the fire.

Immediately, all of the children and a couple of the adults
are examining her, pulling on her curly hair, feeling her
strange clothes, talking at a language she doesn't
understand.

NIKE
(anxious)
Kai. Kai!

Kai looks over, laughs.

KAI
(in Sukhe)
She doesn't speak your language.

SUKHE CHILD
Why is her hair like a sheep's?

Kai shrugs.

KAI
Maybe she's part sheep.

The Sukhe laugh. Nike doesn't understand, but laughs anyway, more because of nerves than anything else.

NIKE
What? What are you saying?

Kai moves over to the fire. One of the Sukhe women won't stop staring at him - it's an unnerving kind of stare. Kai doesn't seem to notice.

LATER:

Nike finishes setting up their tent. Kai comes over from a conversation with one of the men.

KAI
We're about a week's journey from Bekter.

NIKE
As long as he's still there, hey?

Kai shakes his head.

KAI
They made it sound like he's put down stakes. He's set up something like a capital city.

Nike is confused.

NIKE
Isn't that unusual for a Sukhe?

KAI
It's unheard of.

NIKE
Is that... is that bad?

KAI
I can't imagine how it could be.

He looks worried anyway.

FADE TO:

SAME LOCATION - YEAR 15 - EVENING

Kai sits on his horse, staring off towards what used to be a campsite. Nearby, Erik gets a fire going.

Erik sees Kai staring at something.

ERIK
See something?

He's lost in another time, doesn't respond.

ERIK (CONT'D)
Kai?

He snaps out of it.

ERIK (CONT'D)
Is everything okay?

KAI
Nothing.

He gives him a look, but accepts his non-answer.

ERIK
Are you starting to recognize anything?

Kai hides a nervous look. Shakes his head.

KAI
We'll look for smoke in the morning.

ERIK
Shouldn't we be closer than that?

Kai looks over at where the Sukhe tents were eight years ago.

KAI
A lot can change in eight years.

EXT. THE STEPPE - YEAR 15 - DAY

Kai and Erik ride side-by-side.

ERIK
But you said Bekter had built a city, right? They shouldn't be able to move that.

KAI
We can't go there.

Erik looks at him.

ERIK
I thought that's where we were going.

Kai shakes his head.

KAI
Bekter and I... I made Bekter a promise. We're gonna keep him out of this.

ERIK
Kai. We don't exactly have a lot of friends out here. Even if we just stop by to get the lay of the land-

KAI
No.

Kai CLICKS to his horse and speeds up a bit.

EXT. TARGUID CAPITAL OUTSKIRTS - YEAR 7 - DAY

Kai and Nike ride through an odd city of gers intermingled with buildings made of stone and wood.

Sukhe in all sorts of clothes - including some foreign outfits from the Pure White Sea - wander about, most of them taking note of Kai and Nike.

Kai looks at a small temple made of stone, astonished.

NIKE
What? What is it?

KAI
It's a building.

Nike sighs.

NIKE
Of course. How could I not have noticed?

She looks up, and notices the Varangian sigil: the cloud with crossed lightning bolts.

NIKE (CONT'D)

Wait. Erik said the Varangians
didn't come out here.

Kai hasn't noticed the sigil.

KAI

They don't. Why...

He sees it. His face falls.

KAI (CONT'D)

Oh, no. Let's keep moving.

He spurs his horse onward.

NIKE

"Oh, no?"

But he's already moving. She catches up.

EXT. TARGUID CAPITAL SQUARE - YEAR 7 - DAY

Deeper in the city, they reach a large open area, surrounded
by buildings of stone and wood, with very few gers around.

In the open area are dozens of stalls, with merchants hawking
various goods - meats, fruits, milks, and butters; clothes,
both local and foreign; and handicrafts and tools.

NIKE

I thought the Sukhe were nomads.

KAI

They were. Not a thing here is over
eight years old. This is...

An OLD WOMAN sees Kai and her face lights up.

OLD WOMAN

It's him! He's returned!

She points and dances.

People all around start paying more attention to Kai.

Kai swears under his breath.

Nike is as confused as she is curious.

KAI

Come on.

He leads Nike further into the city.

EXT. BEKTER'S TENT - YEAR 7 - DAY

Bekter's "tent" - if it can be called that - is a massive structure made of wood, leather, and silk. In theory it could probably be disassembled and reassembled elsewhere, but it would have to be a difficult process.

It's ornately decorated with different colors, animal bones, and precious stones. It stands at least thirty feet high at its highest point, and could contain a small herd of horses.

Kai and Nike approach, gathering a small crowd of murmuring onlookers as they do.

Nike looks at the crowd.

NIKE

Kai...

KAI

It's okay.

NIKE

What's going on?

Kai sticks two fingers in his mouth, issues a DISTINCTIVE WHISTLE.

Beat.

Bekter, here 31, exits his tent, confused.

Bekter's skin is rough, and covered in scars and tattoos of animals. His left arm is wrapped with a massive burn that's been tattooed into a snake. He wears a bear pelt that's been fashioned into a thick robe.

He stares at Kai for a beat, unsure of what he's seeing.

BEKTER

(in Sukhe)

The spirits mock me.

Kai and Nike dismount.

KAI

(in Sukhe)

Nobody dares mock you.

BEKTER

Kai?

KAI
 (in English)
 In the flesh.

Bekter wraps Kai in a massive hug, laughing. He looks at Kai, as if he wants to say something, but instead laughs more and hugs him again.

EXT. FIELD - YEAR -4 - DAY

Bekter, still bandaged, but able to walk, finishes cinching up the stirrups on a horse. Kai stands nearby.

KAI
 No. You can't put them up that high.

BEKTER
 I would put them up more high. It is the Sukhe way.

KAI
 "Higher." You'd put them up higher.

Bekter feels the word in his mouth.

BEKTER
 High-er.

KAI
 Exactly. But with them that high, I'll have to either be squatting or standing.

Bekter grunts; "That's the idea."

BEKTER
 Solidan horses are not as good for fighting. You need the Sukhe horse.

KAI
A Sukhe horse.

BEKTER
A Sukhe horse.

Bekter pats the saddle, gives Kai a look.

Kai groans as Bekter helps him mount the horse.

KAI
 Why do I even need a horse? I'm faster without one.

EXT. SOLIDAN ROAD - YEAR -4 - DAY

Kai and Bekter ride alongside each other along with the Solidan army column. Bekter is almost healed, and Kai is almost comfortable in his strange Sukhe saddle.

KAI
(in Sukhe)
I desire to go there in the future.

Bekter shakes his head.

BEKTER
(in Sukhe)
I want to go there someday.

KAI
Not "I desire?"

Bekter shrugs.

BEKTER
It's not wrong, it's just... not right. A king might speak that way, but not a soldier.

Kai nods.

KAI
Well. I want to go there someday.

BEKTER
Maybe I'll take you! After working with foreigners like this, I'm without a clan anyway. It'd be good to have-

KAI
(in English)
Woah, not so fast, I can't keep up.

INT. BEKTER'S TENT - YEAR 7 - DAY

The inside of the tent is as ornately decorated as the outside, with a large firepit as the focal point.

Bekter sits with his wife, NERGUI, and their three sons, ages 3, 5, and 9. Kai and Nike sit facing them, on the opposite side of the firepit.

All of them have platters of half-eaten food in front of them, and pick at the food occasionally as they talk.

NIKE
You're lying.

Bekter bursts out into laughter. Kai's embarrassed.

KAI
It's true.

NIKE
A god?

KAI
God is too strong a word. I'm more
of a-

BEKTER
Gokhan. God-king.

KAI
I'd translate it God-noble.

BEKTER
Same-same.

Kai sighs.

NIKE
Does the Order know about this?

KAI
You don't think I'd hide something
like that?

NIKE
No, but-

KAI
It was a... mistake. On their part.
I had nothing to do with it.

BEKTER
You must understand, child...

Nike bristles a little at being called a child.

BEKTER (CONT'D)
So far from your sea, we don't have
many...

He can't think of the word. He looks to Kai.

BEKTER (CONT'D)
Samanlar?

Kai shakes his head.

KAI
We're not *samanlar*.

Bekter shrugs. Not important.

BEKTER
People like you. Varangians.

KAI
People misunderstood what I was able to do. It wasn't healthy; it was why I had to return to the Sea.

NIKE
You wouldn't have otherwise? You would've abandoned the Order?

Kai laughs.

KAI
I already had.

Nike looks at Kai with a new understanding. Or perhaps, a new lack of understanding.

BEKTER
And now you're back!

He raises a bowl of milk-wine and cheers. His family responds likewise, followed by Kai, and then Nike.

EXT. FIELD OF BODIES - YEAR 15 - EVENING

Dozens of dead bodies are scattered around, all of them killed by vicious burns. Lightning burns.

Erik examines one of the less-burnt bodies, as Kai surveys the field.

ERIK
It was her.

KAI
It couldn't have been her.

ERIK
This isn't the same Nike we knew, Kai. She's changed.

Beat. Kai takes it all in.

KAI
There have to be at least fifty
bodies here.

ERIK
Aye.

KAI
Fifty men. Back at the sea, maybe I
could take that many. Maybe. What
about you?

ERIK
Possibly. If I were lucky. But
we're not at the sea.

KAI
So she couldn't have been acting
alone here.

Erik grimaces.

ERIK
You think she's training others.

KAI
Or being corrupted by someone else.

Erik gives him a look.

KAI (CONT'D)
I know it's not... I know it's
unlikely. But it's possible.

Erik sighs.

ERIK
It's... possible.

INT. KAI AND NIKE'S GER - YEAR 7 - NIGHT

Kai sits by the fire. Nike lies on some furs.

KAI
Enough resting. It's time to
meditate.

Nike doesn't move.

KAI (CONT'D)
Nike. I'm not asking.

Nike looks at him.

NIKE
I don't want to.

Kai snorts.

KAI
I didn't ask if you wanted to. Sit
up, come over here.

Nike sits up, but come. She grasps for the right words.

NIKE
It's just... it's... hard.

KAI
I know it's hard. That's why it's
so important.

Kai realizes there's more to it than that.

KAI (CONT'D)
Is everything okay?

NIKE
Yes. No. I just...

She moves over to the fire. Beat.

NIKE (CONT'D)
Back at the temple, Erling and the
others use "Ascension" as some
children's tale to scare me into
being good. "Don't abuse your
powers, Nike! That way lies
Ascension!"

She looks down.

NIKE (CONT'D)
They said it to everyone, but they
said it to me the most. Because,
well, they needed to. And

She looks at Kai.

NIKE (CONT'D)
And now, here... I'm out here
struggling to regain power, but...

Kai gives her a sympathetic look.

KAI

You're not going to Ascend just because you're following your breath. Ascension doesn't work like that. It's...

He sighs, tries to figure out how to put it.

KAI (CONT'D)

It's not about power. It's about not giving up power.

NIKE

I don't understand.

KAI

Power corrupts. Right? The more power I have, the more danger I'm in of being corrupted.

NIKE

Right.

KAI

So then I should just give up all power, right? Not use the power of the Sea, for starters, but that's not the only form of power. I have authority over you as your master. That's a form of power. Should I give that up?

Nike thinks.

NIKE

No. But... I don't know why. Like, you're right. It is power. But... it's good power?

KAI

There is no good power. But there's no bad power, either. It's all just power, and it's all capable of corrupting you, just like it's all capable of being used for good.

NIKE

So where do you draw the line? How do you figure out what power to keep and what to avoid?

Kai chuckles.

KAI

If you can answer that, you've solved the question the Varangian Order was created for.

Nike groans.

INT. KAI AND NIKE'S GER - YEAR 7 - NIGHT

Kai and Nike have been given a large, luxurious Sukhe ger, lined with silks and furs, with a small firepit in the center.

Kai paces as Nike sits by the fire.

NIKE

I'm still getting used to you being a god.

Kai sighs.

NIKE (CONT'D)

Sorry! God-king.

She bows to him. He flicks his ear at her - a rude gesture, like flipping the bird - and she laughs.

KAI

You, of all people-

NIKE

Can appreciate the irony of the situation? Didn't you try to kill me for this?

Kai laughs. Nods.

NIKE (CONT'D)

But really. People don't just accidentally start worshipping you.

KAI

It's complicated.

Beat. He shakes his head.

KAI (CONT'D)

It's not complicated. It's just unpleasant to talk about.

He sits next to Nike at the fire.

A long beat. Nike is merciful.

NIKE
Weren't you going to talk to Bekter
about the witch?

Kai is relieved. What a nice kid.

KAI
I was.

EXT. TARGUID CAPITAL SQUARE ROOFTOP - YEAR 7 - EVENING

Bekter stands on a rooftop overlooking the square.

BEKTER
(in English)
Up here!

Kai walks up to stand next to him.

Beat.

KAI
(in Sukhe)
I wanted to talk to you about-

BEKTER
(in Sukhe)
I know why you're here.

Kai looks at him.

BEKTER (CONT'D)
I didn't think the Varangians were
listening to us anymore.

KAI
We... *they* aren't. I am.

Kai puts a hand on Bekter's shoulder.

KAI (CONT'D)
I always will.

Bekter shrugs Kai's hand off.

BEKTER
I hoped you wouldn't come.

Kai takes a step back.

KAI
What?

BEKTER

This isn't the same steppe you left, Kai. Look at it. You think my people would live in man-made caves like these just because I ordered it?

Kai did think that.

BEKTER (CONT'D)

The grass is dry - a small spark is all it will take to light the entire steppe ablaze. And you... you are no small spark.

KAI

What do you mean?

BEKTER

War, Kai. I've spent the last seven years trying to stop it, but it comes all the same.

KAI

The Varangians are neutral. We're here for the witch, nothing more.

BEKTER

Even if that were true, the witch you're hunting is not neutral. If you kill her...

Beat. Kai processes.

KAI

But Bekter, if we don't kill her-

BEKTER

I fought alongside you many years. I know the danger witches pose.

He looks Kai in the eyes.

BEKTER (CONT'D)

You are always welcome here. Ask me for half of my clan, and I will give it to you. But this thing? To kill this witch? That alone I cannot allow.

EXT. FAR FROM THE BODIES - YEAR 15 - SUNRISE

Kai and Erik sit next to a fire, far enough away from the bodies to sleep, but still too close for comfort.

They've been sitting there for a long time.

ERIK

We need to see him.

KAI

That's not an option that's open to us.

ERIK

We don't have the luxury of options. Not anymore.

KAI

I made a promise-

ERIK

This threatens him, too!

Kai looks away.

ERIK (CONT'D)

Back at the Sea, you said you wanted to protect him. He's half the reason we're here.

Kai nods.

KAI

The best way to protect him is to keep this as far away from him as we can.

Erik stands.

ERIK

This is ridiculous.

He walks away.

EXT. CATTLE FIELDS - YEAR 7 - DAY

Nike sits on a small stool next to a yak. Nergui stands behind her, impatient.

Nike tries to milk the yak, but Nergui disapproves. She *tsks* and takes Nike's hands, then speaks quickly in Sukhe.

NIKE
I don't-

She takes a breath.

NIKE (CONT'D)
(in Sukhe)
What?

Nergui sighs.

NERGUI
(in English)
You hold here. Like this.

She demonstrates.

NERGUI (CONT'D)
Like not this.

She repeats Nike's earlier movements.

NIKE
Like this?

Nike tries again, and this time Nergui approves.

NIKE (CONT'D)
Okay. Okay.

She continues milking. Nergui starts to walk away.

NIKE (CONT'D)
Hey! Wait!

Nergui stops.

NIKE (CONT'D)
How much do I need?

Nergui cocks her head. She doesn't understand.

NIKE (CONT'D)
(in Sukhe)
How much?

Nergui smiles, gestures to the two dozen other yaks grazing nearby. Nike groans. Nergui leaves.

Kai walks by, a shoulder full of fresh animal skins. Nike doesn't look up.

NIKE (CONT'D)
Kai. Is this really necessary?

KAI
 Would you rather help us over
 there?

He gestures, and she looks over where he was working: two
 Sukhe are forearm-deep in slaughtered animals.

Nike gags. Kai keeps walking.

EXT. PILE OF LEATHERS - CONTINUOUS

Kai drops the skins on top of a pile of more skins, next to a
 man and a woman who are preparing the skins for drying.

When he turns around, he sees Nergui watching Nike.

KAI
 (in Sukhe)
 Is she doing okay?

Nergui shrugs.

Beat.

KAI (CONT'D)
 I was talking with your son
 earlier. Bektuge. He's a strong
 boy. You should be proud.

NERGUI
 I do not need you to tell me to be
 proud of my children.

Awkward beat.

KAI
 If I offended you, Nergui-

NERGUI
 All my life my father told me
 stories about the Gokhan. About
 you. I offer sacrifices in your
 temple every year.

KAI
 I don't-

NERGUI
 And now you are here. And what has
 changed? Nothing.

She looks him straight in the eyes.

She walks away.

EXT. HILLTOP - YEAR 7 - NIGHT

Kai and Nike sit on a small hill with a view of Bekter's capital.

KAI

I think we're going to have to do it without him.

NIKE

What?

KAI

He's not going to help us.

NIKE

Help us? I think he'd try to stop us.

KAI

Exactly.

NIKE

But don't you... What if he knows something we don't?

KAI

Maybe he does. But we know that we know something he doesn't.

NIKE

The witch.

KAI

She's powerful, Nike. For us to hear her all the way out here.

NIKE

But I don't understand. We can barely use a tenth of the power we have at the Sea. How can she do anything?

KAI

The steppe has a magic all its own. It's different, certainly. Harder to use. But just as dangerous.

Beat. He sighs.

KAI (CONT'D)

I'll sneak out tomorrow night. I'd like you to be with me, but it's more important for you to stay behind. They'll notice if we're both gone, but with you around it'll be easy for them to assume I'm somewhere too.

NIKE

I don't know, Kai. Can't it... I know how important this is, Kai. I know. But wouldn't it be better if we could get him to help us?

Kai groans.

KAI

Or at least not fight us? Yes.

Beat.

NIKE

Let's wait. Two weeks. We can afford two weeks.

KAI

See if we can't change his mind.

NIKE

Yeah. Or see if can't change ours.

EXT. CAMPSITE - YEAR 15 - NIGHT

The air is still.

A breeze drifts through the campsite.

INT. TENT - YEAR 15 - NIGHT

Kai and Erik sleep in leather bedrolls.

The breeze blows through the flap of the tent, tickles Kai's beard. He stirs.

Beat.

His eyes shoot open. Next to him, Erik bolts up.

EXT. CAMPSITE - YEAR 15 - NIGHT

Kai creeps out of the tent, a slender sword in his hand; Erik exits behind him with a handaxe.

They look around. Nothing.

They look at each other.

ERIK
(quiet)
We both felt it.

NIKE (O.S.)
You did.

Kai and Erik spin around to see Nike standing behind them. Kai levels his sword at her, but Erik just gapes.

Nike looks positively regal. Her curly hair, too unruly for traditional Sukhe braids, has a unique braid of its own that wraps around her head. She wears a long, flowing robe of furs and silks. Her eyes glow.

She glances at Kai's sword.

NIKE (CONT'D)
Is that really necessary?

KAI
You tell me.

Regardless, he lowers the blade.

ERIK
Nike... all this time...

KAI
I have so many questions.

NIKE
I'm not here to answer them.

ERIK
But-

NIKE
It was a mistake, Kai, coming here. This time more so than the last. Go home now, before you make things worse. Again.

KAI
Come back with us.

Nike's eyes harden.

NIKE

You know the answer to that.

KAI

Then you know I can't leave.

NIKE

No, Kai, I know you won't. You can leave, but you won't.

She sighs, turns her back to them.

ERIK

But why? Why won't you come back?

The question he's really asking: Why didn't you come back?

Nike turns to face him.

NIKE

Oh, Erik. I wish I could. Truly.

She looks over her shoulder.

NIKE (CONT'D)

But a Varangian must answer when she's called.

KAI

Then let us help you! If the work here-

She wheels on him, eyes afire, robes rippling with power.

NIKE

You have done enough damage to the steppe for a lifetime, Kai! Leave this place while your actions are still merely unforgivable!

KAI

A Varangian must answer when he's called.

Nike's fury intensifies.

NIKE

Who called you? There was no call.

KAI
(quiet)
There is word of a witch on the
steppe.

NIKE
You're lying!

She looks to Erik. He nods, tears in his eyes.

ERIK
Tell me they're wrong, Nike. Tell
me there is no witch here.

Nike boils over.

NIKE
(furious)
There is no witch here!

And like that, she's gone, disappeared into thin air.

ERIK
No! Nike! NO!

EXT. CAMPSITE - YEAR 15 - MORNING

Kai finishes packing up the tent as Erik cleans up the
campfire.

Once he's finished with the tent, Kai helps Erik.

Beat.

ERIK
We need to go see him.

Kai stretches his back. Sighs.

KAI
I know. But-

ERIK
But nothing. We need to see him.

Beat. Kai nods.

He sighs.

KAI
We're not far.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - YEAR -4 - DAY

Kai and Bekter ride side-by-side through a chaotic battle. Kai is weaponless, but Bekter fires his bow with precision.

Half a dozen enemy cavalry ride over a hill on their flank. They fire a volley of arrows, one of which gets Bekter in the shoulder.

KAI

Bekter!

He leaps from the saddle, floating up on a burst of wind, facing the enemy.

The clouds above darken suddenly as lightning fills his eyes.

Kai flashes forward, becoming the lightning, blasting one of the cavalymen from the saddle. He reforms behind them with the soldier he hit pinned to the ground.

The enemy cavalry wheel around, scattered, as Kai draws his sword and leaps at them. He cuts them down in short order, ignoring one, who charges towards his exposed back.

An arrow pops out of the man's throat, and he falls from his saddle next to Kai.

Kai issues a DISTINCTIVE WHISLE, and his horse runs back to him. He mounts in one fluid movement and rides over to Bekter.

BEKTER

Saved you again!

KAI

I left him for you! So you didn't feel useless.

Bekter rolls his eyes.

EXT. SPARRING GROUND - YEAR 7 - DAY

Kai's fist smashes into Bekter's jaw. Bekter staggers back, but Kai presses the assault.

Bekter grabs Kai's shoulders and rolls backwards, trying to Judo-flip Kai onto his back, but Kai is supernaturally lighter than air. He flips gracefully, and lands on his feet as Bekter hurries to stand again. Kai lets him.

Bekter scowls, but it's a happy scowl. He's enjoying this.

BEKTER
 (in English)
 You are embarrassing me in front of
 my tribe.

KAI
 I'm pretty sure you're the one
 doing that.

Kai charges in, hands up and head tucked. Bekter hunches over, arms out and ready to pounce.

Nearby, in a small crowd, Nike watches next to Nergui, Bekter's wife. Nergui tsks.

NERGUI
 (in Sukhe)
 His poor nose.

Nike looks at her, confused, then looks back to the fight.

Kai charges in, trying to get inside Bekter's guard, and Bekter lets him. Kai gets in a couple shots to Bekter's chest before Bekter wraps Kai in a massive bear hug and squeezes.

Kai wheezes, clearly in pain, manages to headbutt Bekter in his nose.

Nergui winces.

Bekter is staggered, and Kai slips out of his grip, then spins around into a low kick. Bekter drops his entire body on Kai's leg, catching himself in pushup position to avoid snapping it.

The crowd cheers, especially Nergui. Nike shakes her head.

Kai cringes. Oof. They both get back to their feet - Bekter relaxed, Kai into another fighting position.

BEKTER
 I think I won.

KAI
 You think I need both legs to beat
 you?

He lifts one leg into the air.

KAI (CONT'D)
 Come on.

BEKTER
 You do not know when to quit.

KAI
 You've never let me quit before.
 What's changed now?

Bekter charges without warning, but Kai flips into the air over his head, still landing on just one leg.

Nike cheers.

BEKTER
 (in Sukhe)
 I wasn't khan before! I have things
 to do, people to take care of!

KAI
 (in Sukhe)
 And I don't?

BEKTER
 Not out here!

Bekter charges again. Kai spins around him, but Bekter sees it coming and spins too, with a backfist aimed at Kai's head. Kai ducks it, but hits the ground hard, barely rolling back up to his one leg.

Bekter presses his advantage, punching, kicking, getting in Kai's way when he tries to evade. Kai tries to flip over him again, but Bekter leaps into an uppercut that catches Kai in the stomach, and Kai lands on his back.

BEKTER (CONT'D)
 I know you don't think we're done
 here, but we're done.

KAI
 I'm not as helpless as you think.

Bekter kicks at Kai, but Kai catches his leg and yanks him to the ground too. Kai rolls on top of Bekter and tries to pin him.

BEKTER
 You're not as powerful as you
 think, either!

Bekter gets a hold of Kai's arms and pulls them out, forcing Kai to fall on top of him. He wraps Kai's arms behind his back in another bear hug, and squeezes.

Kai wheezes.

BEKTER (CONT'D)
I can take care of myself! I don't
need your help!

Kai shakes his head.

KAI
(gasping, in English)
Everyone... has a... weak... spot!

Bekter's eyes bulge out of his head; Kai's knee is buried into his groin. Still, he doesn't let go.

Both men press their attack, both of them clearly losing their strength... until both pass out simultaneously.

The crowd quiets.

Nergui laughs.

INT. MEDICAL TENT - YEAR -4 - NIGHT

Kai sits next to a wounded Bekter, both of them laughing.

As the laughter fades out, melancholy fades in.

Beat.

BEKTER
I can not continue doing this, Kai.
Fighting other men's wars for them.

KAI
So stop. You're not a citizen, you
have no obligation to stay.

Beat.

BEKTER
I was a khan, you know.

KAI
What? Really?

Bekter nods.

BEKTER
A small tribe in a small clan. Not
important. Not for long.

Beat.

BEKTER (CONT'D)

After I failed, I came here, to learn. I told myself I would learn your discipline, learn how you fight, and bring it back to my people. That was nine years ago.

KAI

Nine years? You were khan when you were, what, ten years old?

BEKTER

Eleven.

Kai is flabbergasted.

KAI

But if... and you... I don't even know where to start.

BEKTER

"Why did you stay so long?"

KAI

Why did you?

Beat.

EXT. SOLIDAN ARMY CAMP - YEAR -4 - MORNING

Bekter says goodbye to a couple other soldiers - mostly other Sukhe - as he finishes loading his horse.

He looks around. Something's missing.

Kai rides up, his horse loaded too.

KAI

About time. I was starting to think I'd have to leave without you.

BEKTER

But... You're...

KAI

Come on, we're burning daylight.

He rides away from the camp. Bekter hops on his horse.

INT. SUKHE TEMPLE - YEAR 7 - DAY

Barely enough light makes it inside to see the rough stone walls and backless benches.

Bekter argues with a a SUKHE PRIEST. They mention Kai's name a couple times.

Nike sits nearby, listening.

Bekter, apparently satisfied, makes to leave until he notices Nike.

BEKTER

(in English)

What are you doing here? Where is Kai?

NIKE

What were you arguing about?

BEKTER

Hm? Oh. It is not important.

NIKE

I know you were talking about Kai.

Bekter sighs.

BEKTER

It is not important. We disagree on something.

NIKE

You don't want them to worship Kai.

BEKTER

...No.

NIKE

But you let them do it before.

BEKTER

He was not here before. And I never approved.

NIKE

So you don't believe it?

Bekter laughs.

BEKTER

Believe? That Kai is the Gokhan?

He laughs more.

BEKTER (CONT'D)
Kai is a great man, but that is all
that he is.

NIKE
But Kai said the prophecies-

BEKTER
I don't want to speak about this.

He walks away.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PATH - YEAR -4 - DAY

Kai and Bekter ride next to each other. Bekter is still
looking at Kai like he's crazy.

BEKTER
And you will simply learn how to
live on the steppe.

KAI
I have a great teacher.

BEKTER
(in Sukhe)
And you'll just learn how to speak
our language.

KAI
(in Sukhe)
I know already the beginning.

Bekter laughs.

BEKTER
(in English)
Your family? The Varangians?

Kai shrugs.

KAI
They'll get by.

Bekter laughs again - this time less disbelieving, more
happy. It's starting to sink in.

EXT. THE STEPPE - YEAR 7 - MORNING

Kai, Bekter, Nike, and Nergui sit on their horses, half a dozen soldiers a respectful distance behind them. Everyone but Nike carries a bow and arrows.

They scan the horizon. Bekter looks out a column of smoke.

BEKTER
(in Sukhe)
There. That's them.

KAI
I see it.

Nike's still looking, so Kai points it out to her.

NERGUI
They're getting bold.

BEKTER
They've always been bold. Now
they're getting desperate.

He WHISTLES to the soldiers behind him. One of them rides towards the smoke.

BEKTER (CONT'D)
(to Kai)
You see why I can't let you hunt
your witch now?

Nergui watches Kai's response carefully. Kai notices.

KAI
There've always been bandits
nipping at us. This isn't new.

BEKTER
These are no bandits!

His horse shifts, picking up on his agitation.

NERGUI
It's her. Ever since she took
power, the other tribes have
become... less friendly.

KAI
Her? The witch?

Bekter scoffs, angry, but says nothing.

NERGUI

She rallies the steppe against us.

KAI

Bekter.

BEKTER

We outnumber them three to one, and we have our walls. Let them crash against us, and we'll see who remains standing.

The RIDER Bekter sent off returns.

RIDER

Eight men, khan. Soldiers. A scouting party.

BEKTER

Can we catch them?

The rider considers.

RIDER

The ground is hard, khan. There will be dust, and noise.

Bekter curses in English.

He whistles, gestures to his men.

Kai holds up a hand.

KAI

Wait.

Bekter waits.

KAI (CONT'D)

We can handle this. No noise.

He hops off of his horse.

KAI (CONT'D)

(in English)

Come on, Nike.

She hasn't been following the conversation, but she gets off her horse as well.

BEKTER

You're a little far from the sea to fight so many, aren't you?

KAI
 (in Sukhe)
 We'll be fine.
 (in English)
 Won't we, Nike?

NIKE
 What?

Kai runs at incredible speed towards the smoke. Nike follows.
 The soldiers marvel. Nergui smiles. Bekter just watches.

RIDER
 Gokhan...

EXT. SCOUTS' CAMPSITE - YEAR 7 - DAY

Eight Sukhe soldiers sit around a fire, finishing breakfast.
 Kai is suddenly standing just behind them.

KAI
 (in Sukhe)
 Greetings.

They all leap to their feet and face Kai, startled, but with
 weapons drawn and ready to fight.

Kai examines their outfits.

KAI (CONT'D)
 (in Sukhe)
 Clan Dorben? You're far from your
 lands, aren't you?

DORBEN SOLDIER
 Says the wide-eye.

KAI
 That's a lot of swords. Are wide-
 eyes your enemy, then?

The soldiers relax, if only a little.

DORBEN SOLDIER
 How am I to know? You're the first
 I've seen.

KAI
 You're not the first from Clan
 Dorben that I've seen.

The soldier examines him. Who the hell is this guy?

DORBEN SOLDIER
And were they your enemy?

KAI
No. But it's been a long time.

He paces around them. They relax more, lower their weapons.

KAI (CONT'D)
I have a friend who wants me to
kill you.

They raise their weapons again, but Kai is too relaxed for them to get too nervous.

DORBEN SOLDIER
Is that so?

KAI
Bekter Khan.

They shout and yell at each other. "They spotted us!" "We need to leave!" "Where are they?"

The soldier examines him again.

Oh, shit.

DORBEN SOLDIER
You're him. Bekter's shaman. You're
the one she warned us about.

That catches Kai's attention.

KAI
Who is "she?"

The soldiers attack, but Kai is too fast to see, much less hit. He weaves in and out, ducking their swords like they're moving through molasses.

KAI (CONT'D)
Nike!

And suddenly she's there too, sword in each hand. She's not as fast as Kai, but she's got the element of surprise, and she kills two of them before they even realize she's there.

She cuts her way next to Kai, and gives him one of the swords.

And then suddenly they're moving again, weaving around the remaining soldiers, two warriors somehow surrounding six.

Six becomes three, then one. Kai pins the last soldier to the ground, his sword pressing against the Sukhe's neck.

KAI (CONT'D)
I asked you a question.

EXT. THE STEPPE - YEAR 7 - DAY

Kai and Nike storm over to Bekter and his soldiers. Nike is concerned, scared, but angry. Kai is just furious.

BEKTER
(in Sukhe)
Kai, is-

KAI
(in Sukhe, to the others)
Leave us.

The soldiers look at each other, then to Bekter. They want to obey Kai, but Bekter is still their khan.

BEKTER
Go.

The soldiers leave.

KAI
(in English)
You too, Nike.

NIKE
But Kai-

NERGUI
(in Sukhe)
Come, child.

She gestures to Nike. Nike reluctantly obeys. She mounts her horse, and they ride off with the soldiers.

As they go, they hear Kai and Bekter yelling at each other. Nike looks back.

BEKTER
(in English)
I am Khan of Khans! You will do no such thing!

KAI
(in English)
I do not answer to you!

Kai mounts his horse and gallops past Nike and the others.

EXT. TARGUID CAPITAL OUTSKIRTS - YEAR 15 - MORNING

Kai sits on his horse in front of the now-abandoned temple, staring at where the Varangian sigil used to be. It's been blasted out of the stone, leaving a blackened hole.

Erik rides over to him.

ERIK
What is this?

KAI
My temple.

ERIK
...Your?

Kai doesn't respond, just rides off.

ERIK (CONT'D)
He has a temple?

EXT. TARGUID CAPITAL SQUARE - YEAR 15 - DAY

A couple of the stone buildings have fallen, but most of them are still in perfect condition. The square itself is overgrown with grass and weeds.

Kai rides through the square, Erik a short distance behind him.

Erik shakes his head. Stops.

ERIK
Kai.

Kai stops, looks back.

ERIK (CONT'D)
We need to talk.

KAI
I'm listening.

ERIK
I need to know what happened.

KAI
What happened?

ERIK
To Nike. To you. Out here.

Kai takes a breath.

KAI
Do you remember that witch? The...
the southern one.

ERIK
With the...

He pantomimes fangs.

ERIK (CONT'D)
She sharpened her teeth?

Kai shakes his head.

Erik thinks.

ERIK (CONT'D)
You mean the one that wasn't really
a witch?

KAI
That one.

ERIK
What about her?

KAI
Who would you rather fight? Her, or
the...

He pantomimes fangs.

ERIK
Oh, the teeth. Without a doubt.

KAI
Why? She was powerful. The other
one was faking everything.

ERIK
That's true. But sharp-teeth was
dangerous like an animal is
dangerous. The other one... she
knew how people worked.

KAI
So does Nike.

He gestures all around them.

KAI (CONT'D)
You see all this?

ERIK
Of course.

KAI
It was alive when we got here. It
was abandoned when we left. We did
that. I did that.

ERIK
What do you mean? What happened?

Kai looks at him. Beat.

EXT. KAI AND NIKE'S GER - YEAR 7 - NIGHT

Kai meditates. Nike paces.

NIKE
But why didn't he tell us it was
that bad?

KAI
Because he knew what we'd do next.

NIKE
So we're going to do it? We're just
gonna go?

KAI
No. We need his support now more
than ever.

NIKE
Then what?

KAI
I don't know.

Beat. Nike pauses.

NIKE
There is one option...

Kai opens his eyes.

NIKE (CONT'D)

We don't need his support. We need his tribe. His soldiers.

She looks at Kai. He stares at her.

KAI

That... is a dangerous road.

NIKE

It's our only road, Kai. If what he said is true.

KAI

Even if we wanted to... Bekter is a great leader. I don't know if we could-

NIKE

Kai, you're a god.

Kai knows she's right, but doesn't want her to be.

NIKE (CONT'D)

And it's not about what we want to do. It's about what we need to do.

KAI

If I do this, I destroy my friend. Our entire relationship.

NIKE

And if you don't?

Kai looks at her for a beat. Closes his eyes.

His voice is suddenly... heavier. Sad.

KAI

I don't know how to... be a god.

Nike takes a breath.

NIKE

I can teach you.

Kai blanches.

KAI

This isn't... this is the definition of Ascension. There has to be another way.

NIKE

You're the one who taught me that Ascension isn't about taking power, it's about trying to keep it. You don't want the power. You'd rather do anything else.

She puts her hands on his shoulders.

NIKE (CONT'D)

This isn't Ascension. This is a good man forced into an impossible decision.

Kai hangs his head.

EXT. TARGUID CAPITAL OUTSKIRTS - YEAR 7 - DAY

Bekter storms through a crowd, furious about something.

The further he gets, the thicker the crowd. It reaches the point where he's shoving people aside to move forward.

The crowd chatters, excited, with one word in particular standing out:

Gokhan.

Bekter gets through the crowd to a small open space in front of the temple. Kai hovers three feet in the air, legs crossed, meditating.

He's not saying or doing anything else. He doesn't have to.

Nike stands next to him. She locks eyes with Bekter. Steps back, giving him access to Kai.

Bekter approaches, mindful of the watching crowd.

Kai speaks without opening his eyes.

KAI

Bekter.

BEKTER

(in English)

Tell me I am misunderstanding what is happening.

KAI

(in Sukhe)

Nothing is happening. I am meditating.

Bekter glares at the crowd, then back at Kai.

BEKTER
Do not lie to me, Kai.

Nike coughs, apologetic. Bekter looks at her.

NIKE
(in English)
It would be wise for you to be seen
being friendly with him.

Bekter's eyes are furious, but he manages to keep himself in check. He nods to Nike. He even warms his tone of voice.

BEKTER
(to Kai)
Our friendship is over. You have
ended it.

KAI
(in Sukhe)
I assumed.

Bekter stands for a beat, gathering himself.

He walks back to the crowd.

Kai opens his eyes. His anguish is visible.

KAI (CONT'D)
Bekter.

Bekter stops, looks back.

KAI (CONT'D)
(in English)
I'm sorry it came to this.

Bekter turns around, disappears into the crowd.

INT. BEKTER'S TENT - YEAR 7 - NIGHT

Bekter paces angrily. Nergui sits, thinking.

BEKTER
(in Sukhe)
This is unacceptable. We need to
get rid of him immediately.

NERGUI
If you banish him, you banish all
those who follow him.

BEKTER

And that number grows by the day!
The longer I wait, the worse the
problem!

NERGUI

Bekter... there is something you
must consider.

BEKTER

What?

NERGUI

I'm not saying this is the case.
But suppose you're wrong.

Bekter freezes.

NERGUI (CONT'D)

Suppose he is Gokhan.

Beat. Bekter's emotions are unreadable.

NERGUI (CONT'D)

If he were, to fight him would be a
betrayal of our oldest traditions.

Bekter's speech is careful, measured.

BEKTER

He is not Gokhan.

NERGUI

But if-

Bekter glares at Nergui, shouts at her, but there's no anger
in his eyes. It's fear.

It's doubt.

BEKTER

He is a man!

EXT. TARGUID CAPITAL SQUARE - YEAR 15 - EVENING

Kai and Erik sit at a campfire.

ERIK

Storms, Kai. So that's... shit.

Kai nods.

ERIK (CONT'D)

It's not your fault, Kai. You couldn't have known, and even if you had-

KAI

No. I did know. And both choices were bad, so I should've trusted my friend, rather than taking an entire people into my hands.

Erik thinks. Nods.

ERIK

Fine. But it's the same decision I would've made, so I for one can't judge.

He sighs.

ERIK (CONT'D)

It does cast our current journey in a bit of a different light.

Kai looks at him.

KAI

How do you mean?

ERIK

Nike... She knows exactly what she's doing. She's done it before, she's done it on purpose.

KAI

I know. And I accept that we may have to-

ERIK

And she did it with you. That's why you can't kill her.

Erik doesn't take his eyes off of Kai.

KAI

What?

ERIK

This isn't about Nike, Kai. Not just her, at least. We're not just saving her. We're saving you.

Kai... nods.

Erik walks to Kai. Kai stands to face him.

Erik takes Kai's hand, clasps it in his.

ERIK (CONT'D)

We will do everything we can to save her, Kai. And if we can't; if we have to kill her? You won't have to do it. I'll be the one to-

A FLASH and a THUNDERCRACK. It's deafening.

Erik is lying on the ground a dozen yards away, burned and smoking.

Nike is kneeling next to him, cradling his head. There are tears in her eyes.

NIKE

I didn't want this, Erik. I didn't want any of this.

She looks at Kai. Tears are replaced by fury.

Kai is ready for a fight. His eyes glow with power, and fire dances from his closed fists.

Nike snarls.

KAI

It doesn't have to-

NIKE

It does. It didn't have to be like this. But it does now. Because of you.

She gets to her feet. Then rises a foot off of the ground. Lightning wreathes her body, and light streams from her eyes, her nostrils, her mouth, her fingertips.

Nike's voice booms like thunder as she stares daggers at Kai.

NIKE (CONT'D)

Never let anyone convince you that this is anything other than your fault.

She FLASHES towards Kai, who narrowly dodges out of the way even with his superhuman reflexes.

Kai draws his sword in a counterattack; Nike doesn't even try to dodge, she just watches the sword EXPLODE off of her skin.

NIKE (CONT'D)

Pathetic.

She touches his chest, and a surge of lightning blows him into the air.

Kai wraps his hands around the lightning, stopping his momentum in midair. He hurls the lightning back at Nike, but she dodges casually.

NIKE (CONT'D)

You've failed. Accept defeat.

Kai charges into Nike, and the ferocity of his assault catches her off-guard. He slams Nike into a stone wall that was a dozen yards away.

Kai doesn't let up, unleashing a storm of energy-enhanced punches and kicks, each blow knocking her further into the wall.

Erik stirs.

Kai hits Nike hard enough to break through the wall, and she disappears in the building.

Kai charges in after her and out of sight.

The whole building EXPLODES IN LIGHT.

Kai is blown through the air, hitting the ground on the other side of the square.

ERIK

(weak)

Kai...

Nike floats through the air, lightning streaming from her skin.

Kai gets to his feet.

Just like that, Nike is on top of him. She raises one hand, and Kai lifts into the air, wind raging around him.

NIKE

You should not have brought him here.

KAI

You don't have to do this! It's not too late to-

NIKE

You think I want to do this? This is kill or be killed! If I don't kill you, you'll kill me!

KAI

I don't want to kill you!

ERIK

(strained)

I do.

Erik hurls a MASSIVE SURGE OF WIND at Nike, hurling her backwards and freeing Kai.

Nike screams, and with a FLASH, she's gone.

Kai collapses to all fours, gasps for breath.

The last bit of energy leaves Erik's body.

A long beat.

EXT. TARGUID CAPITAL OUTSKIRTS - YEAR 7 - DAY

Kai stands on the steps of the temple, speaking to a gigantic crowd. He doesn't shout, but his voice somehow carries to the farthest extent of the crowd.

Nike stands beside him, anxious, but doing a good job of hiding it.

KAI

(in Sukhe)

I am not a violent man. But if there must be war, one must respond quickly, not hide and wait and hope evil will disappear on its own.

The crowd murmurs.

KAI (CONT'D)

Even now, the Outer Clans assemble against us. This is not their doing - not a natural event. In the years before, these people did not want war. But always, there was one who did. There is one who still does. You know her name.

The crowd hisses. "Szelanya."

KAI (CONT'D)

She uses them as a tool to fight all that is good and light in the world. She is the fire that brings no light. She is the rain that does not nourish. If she is allowed to continue in her path of chaos and destruction, the entire steppe will fall.

He pauses. He's not enjoying this.

KAI (CONT'D)

Bekter Khagan is a great man, who hungers for peace and thirsts for the safety of his people. This does not make him a weak khan, it makes him great. But it is not yet the time for a great khan. That day will come, but this... this is the time for a conqueror.

A beat. Kai knows this is the point of no return.

KAI (CONT'D)

This is the time for a Gokhan.

The crowd cheers and shouts.

Kai and Nike share an uneasy glance. This is important. This is necessary. But that does not mean it's good.

INT. BEKTER'S TENT - YEAR 7 - NIGHT

Kai and Bekter sit across from each other.

A long beat.

BEKTER

(in Sukhe)

You will let my people die fighting your war.

KAI

(in Sukhe)

It is not my war.

BEKTER

It is not ours!

KAI

It's hers.

BEKTER

She is nothing. She is powerful,
but she is not a god. She will fall
when her people see she brings no
victory.

KAI

You don't understand her power. She
could kill a man with a gesture, a
dozen with a word. She will bring
her people victory.

BEKTER

I understand her power. You do not
understand my people.

KAI

We have had this discussion,
Bekter. We will not sway each
other.

Beat. Bekter's walls break down; he's no longer stern, just
afraid.

BEKTER

Tell me this. You speak with such
certainty, such conviction. Are you
really so certain?

Kai lowers his walls too. He's wracked with doubt.

KAI

How could I be?

BEKTER

And yet you are certain enough to
sentence my people to death?

KAI

I'm terrified that if I don't act
now, you're already dead.

EXT. TARGUID CLAN CAMP - YEAR -4 - NIGHT

The camp is still, quiet.

Beat.

Shadows move in the distance.

Beat.

Kai crawls out of one of the tents. Looks around.

Beat.

Kai shouts.

KAI
(in Sukhe)
Awake! Awake! Enemy! Awake!

He draws his sword and runs through the camp.

KAI (CONT'D)
Awake! Awake!

A dull RUMBLING slowly grows into the CLAMOR OF HOOFBEATS.

Men emerge from their tents, half-asleep but adrenaline already pumping.

Bekter charges from his tent, sword out, already ready for combat. He leaps onto his horse and yells.

Dozens of RIVAL CLANSMEN charge over a nearby hill, stealth forgotten, ready for battle.

Kai tries to gather his energy, but can't. Something's wrong.

They run through the camp, their first charge felling at least a dozen of Bekter's clan.

KAI (CONT'D)
NO!

His eyes glow.

He leaps six feet into the air, tackling an enemy horseman off his horse and stabbing him in midair.

He lands in a run, sweeping under another horse and slitting its saddle straps. A quick tug on the saddle pulls the rider off of the horse and into Kai's sword.

Bekter tries to rally the clan, but everyone is already running away.

BEKTER
To me! We can beat them!

An enemy rider charges towards him, but he deftly deflects the attack and dispatches the rider.

As he falls, two more enemies charge to take his place.

He blocks the first attack, but is wide open for the second... until a spear, wreathed in the lightning, pierces through the second attacker's chest.

THAT got everyone's attention. Allies and enemies.

Kai's getting a little bit of his mojo back. His sword crackles with power, as he leaps and twists and rides around the battlefield.

BEKTER (CONT'D)

Come on, you cowards! Fight!

Bekter charges into the fray, and some of the clan follows suit.

Not that there's much "fray" left - Kai's showy demonstrations of power has the enemy spooked; they run away.

The clan CHEERS as they pursue the fleeing enemy.

EXT. TARGUID CLAN CAMP - YEAR -4 - SUNRISE

The tribe cleans up the camp - they gather the fallen, loot the enemy, and treat the wounded.

Bekter and Kai ride back into the camp with some of the other warriors, leading several of the enemy's horses.

As they do, the camp cheers.

Kai and Bekter look at each other. Laugh.

SUKHE MAN

(in Sukhe)

Gokhan! He has saved us!

The camp cheers again, with several cries of "Gokhan!"

Bekter's confused. He looks around.

BEKTER

(in English)

Where is the Gokhan? It is me and Kai who have saved you!

KAI

(in English)

What? Gokhan?

BEKTER

A myth. A...

The clan kneels as Kai rides past. Bekter notices, laughs.
He slaps Kai on the back.

BEKTER (CONT'D)
Oh! It is you! You are the Gokhan!

KAI
What? What's a Go-khan?

Bekter's laughing too hard to answer.
He gets ahold of himself.

BEKTER
(in Sukhe, to crowd)
No, no no. He's just a shaman.
Look, he's even bleeding.

Kai catches on.

KAI
(in English.)
Oh. No no no no no.
(in Sukhe)
No. Not Gokhan. No. Get up. No.

The people are confused. They don't want to listen to him.
Kai gets off of his horse and pulls the kneeling Sukhe to
their feet.

KAI (CONT'D)
Stop. No. Not Gokhan. Normal man.

SUKHE WOMAN
But Gokhan! We saw your power! Your
voice is thunder and your tongue is
lightning!

KAI
No. Where my home is, there are
many like this.

SUKHE WOMAN
Yes! With the gods!

KAI
No! Across the mountains! Solidus!
I am a Solidan.

SUKHE MAN
But we saw you, Gokhan!

Kai looks to Bekter, exasperated.

KAI
(in English)
This is... this is a nightmare.
This is, like, the definition of
Ascension.

Bekter just laughs. Kai laughs too, but it's a worried laugh.

EXT. TARGUID CAPITAL SQUARE - YEAR 15 - NIGHT

Erik's body lies on a pile of wood, in the middle of a ring of stones. Kai kneels in front of the ring. He chants.

KAI
May the wind lead you
May the sea watch you
May the clouds lift you
May the sky take you
Back to your father and mother
Back to the land of your people
Back to the shores of home

He stands, and approaches Erik's body. He kneels, and blows on Erik's face.

KAI (CONT'D)
For the journey.

He stands, exits the circle of stones.

Kai's eyes roll back into his head, and he yells and wails in an ecstatic trance.

His feet lift off the ground. The wind rages around him.

A fierce bolt of lightning strikes Erik's body, and it's consumed in flames.

Kai drops gently to the ground.

He watches Erik's body burn.

Beat.

KAI (CONT'D)
Give me a proper funeral if I die.

Beat. He looks over at a specific area, but we can't see anything there.

KAI (CONT'D)

There was nothing I regretted more about your death than not giving her a proper funeral. Our lives are temporary, but our deaths are forever.

He gathers his things and leads the horses away.

A long beat.

Suddenly, Nike stands at the foot of the pyre, inside the ring of stones.

She kneels before Erik's body; the flames turn violet where they touch her, and she somehow remains unharmed.

She leans into the fire, blows on Erik. Her voice is sad.

NIKE

For the journey.

She looks up, and sees Kai across the square, staring at her.

She stands, uncertain.

Kai nods to her, tears in his eyes. Walks away.

Nike drops to her knees and sobs.

EXT. THE STEPPE - YEAR 15 - DAY

Kai rides across the steppe, leading Erik's horse.

He sighs.

KAI

Regardless of what you may think, you're no god. You can't be in two places at once, and you need to sleep sometimes.

He looks around.

KAI (CONT'D)

If I were a god, where would I sleep?

An idea. He turns north. Looks towards a small mountain that stands alone.

EXT. TARGUID CAPITAL SQUARE ROOFTOP - YEAR 7 - DAY

Kai and Nike stand on the rooftop, looking down at a horde of worshippers and followers.

NIKE

Have you ever wondered if they're right?

KAI

What?

NIKE

You said yourself, the prophecies are weirdly specific. And accurate. What if you are the Gokhan?

Kai can't help but laugh.

NIKE (CONT'D)

Look at all of those people down there. Every single one of them believes you're the Gokhan.

KAI

Because I lied to them.

NIKE

I know. I'm just saying-

KAI

It's dangerous to think that way. People can get hurt. You should know this better than anyone.

NIKE

I do. I do.

Beat.

Kai sighs.

KAI

Now for the gamble.

Kai steps to the edge of the rooftop. The crowd cheers.

Kai's voice carries unnaturally far, without shouting.

KAI (CONT'D)

(in Sukhe)

The time has come!

EXT. BEKTER'S TENT - YEAR 7 - DAY

Kai and Nike ride on horseback at the head of the massive crowd from before.

KAI
Bekter Khagan!

A pregnant beat.

Bekter emerges from his tent.

He eyes the crowd. Narrows his eyes at Kai.

BEKTER
(in Sukhe)
What is the meaning of this?

KAI
(in Sukhe)
The time has come for war, and your people need their khan.

Bekter looks at Kai. He's surprised.

BEKTER
(in English)
I will not lead my people to their deaths.

KAI
(in English)
Your people are going anyway. I don't want to steal them from you again.

Beat.

KAI (CONT'D)
Don't do it for me. Do it for them. You know I'm not who they think I am. You know they need a khan.

Bekter... nods.

Turns to the crowd.

He raises one fist in the air and unleashes a high-pitched war cry.

The crowd mimics his cry. There's an energy in the air.

Bekter shouts to Kai over the clamor.

BEKTER
 (in English)
 If you don't die, I'll kill you for
 this.

Kai nods.

EXT. TARGUID CAPITAL OUTSKIRTS - YEAR 7 - DAY

The army rides out into the steppe. Kai and Nike ride next to each other.

Nike stops. Looks at Kai.

NIKE
 Master.

Kai stops.

NIKE (CONT'D)
 I don't...

Beat.

KAI
 You don't have to come.

NIKE
 If you need me, I'll-

KAI
 If we didn't have the army, I would need you. Even if we did have the army, if we didn't have Bekter, I still might.

Nike looks at the ground. Kai puts a hand on her shoulder.

KAI (CONT'D)
 This is not a weakness, Nike. This is a strength. Not two years ago, you would've let yourself charge into a situation you knew would be too much for you.

NIKE
 It feels like a weakness.

KAI
 Suppose you did come, and suppose she could corrupt you. With your power and training?
 (MORE)

KAI (CONT'D)
 I'd have no choice but to kill you
 if I even thought you were
 Ascending. No, this is the right
 choice.

He shrugs.

KAI (CONT'D)
 Besides. Suppose we fail. You'll be
 the last line of defense the clan
 has.

EXT. THE STEPPE - YEAR -4 - DAY

Kai and Bekter fight in a vicious battle.

EXT. TARGUID CLAN CAMP - YEAR -4 - DAY

Kai and Bekter lead their men back into the camp, which has
 grown significantly.

They're greeted by a small crowd of worshippers.

One of the WARRIORS they lead shouts cheerfully.

WARRIOR
 (in Sukhe)
 Kai Gokhan has again led us to
 victory!

Kai looks at Bekter. Bekter isn't amused anymore.

BEKTER
 (in Sukhe)
 Enough of this!

He hops off of his horse. Grabs one worshipper wearing ornate
 robes - a self-styled PRIEST.

BEKTER (CONT'D)
 Why do you call him Gokhan and
 disrespect your Khan?

PRIEST
 Because he is Gokhan! His coming
 was foretold!

BEKTER
 The Gokhan will lead the entire
 steppe, not just one tribe.

PRIEST

But he will grow out of the West,
in a tribe both with and without a
khan. And you, khan, were absent
for many years, making us-

BEKTER

I understand. But the Gokhan will
be heralded by... oh, that's me
too, isn't it?

The priest nods.

BEKTER (CONT'D)

Aha! But the Gokhan will have the
Mark of Liong.

The priest is worried.

PRIEST

He does not?

BEKTER

(to Kai)

Do you have the Mark of Liong?

KAI

(in English)

The what?

BEKTER

(in English)

The Mark of Liong.

KAI

I don't even know what that is.

BEKTER

(in Sukhe, to priest)

He doesn't even know what it is.

PRIEST

(to Kai)

The holy mark! The Clouded Eye!

He draws a simple sigil of an eye in the dirt.

Kai gets off his horse to examine it.

Kai's face falls.

KAI

Bekter.

He gestures. Bekter approaches.

BEKTER
(quiet, in English)
Don't tell me.

KAI
(in English)
I have a scar.

BEKTER
What could give you a scar like
that?!

The priest isn't quite sure what they're talking about, but he's getting the idea it's favorable to him.

KAI
It was an arrow, and it scarred
oddly because you yanked it out of
me and yelled something like,
"Don't be a child."

Bekter grimaces.

PRIEST
He has the mark?

Kai sighs. Looks at Bekter.

Bekter throws his hands up.

BEKTER
(in Sukhe)
Bring me the holy books! I want to
read these prophecies.

He storms off.

EXT. THE DARK PLAINS - YEAR 15 - DAY

The land is rocky, craggy, unwelcoming. You don't have to look too hard to see dessicated human bones.

Kai walk through the plains. It's an emotional experience for Kai.

He sees a complete skeleton, still armed with the sword it carried in life.

EXT. THE DARK PLAINS - YEAR 7 - DAY

The skeleton is here still a corpse, freshly slain.

Battle rages around it; Bekter's army versus a massive horde of barbaric warriors.

Bekter charges his horse past a barbarian, cleaving the warrior's head from his shoulders.

He smiles. He may not have wanted this fight, but it does feel good to finally take the battle to their enemies.

He surveys the battlefield, sees Kai dispatch three men at once. Kai doesn't look as happy.

He rides over to Kai.

BEKTER

(in English)

They're even more disorganized than I thought! Perhaps you were right all along!

Kai shakes his head.

KAI

This is wrong.

BEKTER

Wrong? This was your idea! I tried to tell you-

KAI

I don't mean ethically. I mean... look at this.

Bekter's forces are clearly superior. The battle could not be going better.

KAI (CONT'D)

They're hardly putting up a fight.

Bekter looks at the fight with new eyes. Kai's right.

KAI (CONT'D)

And where's the witch? Where's Szelanya? I didn't expect her to lead the charge, but for the battle to go on so long without her...

Kai and Bekter look at each other. They have the same realization at the same time.

BEKTER
 (in Sukhe)
 Fall back! Retreat!

KAI
 (in Sukhe)
 We have to leave! Stop! Pull back!

They try to get their men to retreat, but they're lost in their victory.

EXT. TARGUID CAPITAL OUTSKIRTS - YEAR 7 - DAY

The sky is dark with stormclouds.

Nike and Nergui stand on the city's walls, staring out at the barbaric horde arranged outside the city. Already, the buildings outside the walls are burning.

At the head of the horde, staring at Nike, is SZELANYA. Her white hair is wispy, missing in odd clumps. Her skin is covered in self-inflicted ritual scars. Her only clothing is a bone-covered mantle that stretches far enough to drag along the ground. Her eyes glow violet, and violet light streams from between her rotted teeth. However, despite her ruined appearance, she looks young - she can't be out of her twenties.

Nike's terrified, but carries herself well.

Nergui hides her fear behind fury.

Szelanya is filled with rapturous bloodlust.

EXT. TARGUID CLAN CAMP - YEAR -4 - DAY

Kai steps out of his tent and into a mass of kneeling Sukhe.

As soon as they see him, they erupt in cheers. Kai wades through them, and they watch as he goes to the edge of the camp, where Bekter scowls.

BEKTER
 This is too much.

KAI
 I agree. I've tried everything-

Bekter glares at him.

BEKTER
 Have you? Everything?

Kai's taken off-guard by Bekter's edge.

KAI
I have. This isn't something I
want, Bekter.

BEKTER
Who can say that? Who does not want
to be a god?

KAI
I don't!

BEKTER
I value your friendship more than
my entire clan. For you to come
here with me was a love as strong
as that between husband and wife.

Bekter looks away. He may be upset, but this next part is
very hard for him to say.

BEKTER (CONT'D)
But I think also it was a mistake.

Kai doesn't disagree, but it still stings.

Bekter forces himself to look at Kai.

BEKTER (CONT'D)
Our peoples are too different. You
do not belong here any more than I
belonged there.

Kai nods.

KAI
I understand.

Bekter is severely pained.

BEKTER
I do not wish for this. Never have
I wished for this.

KAI
I know. But you're right.

A beat.

BEKTER
Already, the days grow long. The
rains will come soon. You should
wait until-

KAI
 The rains don't bother a Varangian.
 I'll be safer with them than
 without.

Bekter nods.

BEKTER
 Soon, then.

Kai nods.

KAI
 Soon.

EXT. THE STEPPE - YEAR -4 - MORNING

Kai and Bekter ride side-by-side across the plains.

They come to a stop near a small stream.

KAI
 I guess this is it.

BEKTER
 No. I can travel with you farther.
 My people-

KAI
 Your people need you, Bekter,
 especially now.

Beat. Bekter nods.

BEKTER
 This is... I had not prepared
 myself to say goodbye to you.

KAI
 Then don't. The winds blow far.
 We'll meet again.

Bekter stares at Kai a beat.

Abruptly turns around and gallops away.

Kai watches him ride, then turns to ford the stream.

EXT. THE DARK PLAINS - YEAR 15 - EVENING

Sukhe camps fill the plains. The Sukhe here are a hard
 people, toughened by years of war and conflict.

Kai rides through the camps.

KAI
What is this? Why are they here?

The Sukhe glare at the two outsiders. They're not happy to see outsiders, but it's not that they're angry - they're...

Scared?

Kai looks up at the mountain peak. Dark clouds swirl around it.

KAI (CONT'D)
This is your tribe.

Whispers slide through the crowd.

"Nike."

"Gokhan."

EXT. THE DARK PLAINS, TARGUID CAMP - YEAR 15 - CONTINUOUS

KAI
Oh, no.

The tents here are marked with the sigils of Bekter's clan.

Kai dismounts, runs over to some of the Sukhe.

KAI (CONT'D)
(in Sukhe)
Is he here? Where is Bekter?

The Sukhe's faces light up.

SUKHE MAN
Gokhan. Gokhan!

KAI
Where is Bekter?!

NERGUI
(to Sukhe Man)
He is not Gokhan.

Nergui stands outside a tent, just as angry as the last time we saw her.

Kai looks at her. She looks at him.

NERGUI (CONT'D)
He is an imposter.

KAI
Is Bekter-

NERGUI
He'll return soon.

INT. BEKTER AND NERGUI'S TENT - YEAR 15 - NIGHT

The tent is barely big enough to qualify as "humble." Kai and Nergui sit around a small fire.

NERGUI
(in Sukhe)
You're lucky. When she's on the mountain, she's lost to the world. You have a day, maybe two before she knows about this. It might be enough time for you to run.

KAI
(in Sukhe)
I'm not running.

NERGUI
I thought that was your way.

Beat. Kai can't look her in the eyes.

NERGUI (CONT'D)
If you fight her, you will fail.

KAI
I know.

Beat. Nergui considers.

NERGUI
I suppose a good death is better than a bad life.

KAI
I refuse to believe she's completely gone.

NERGUI
What do you mean?

KAI
She's not... she hasn't ascended. She can still be saved.

NERGUI
Saved from what?

Kai gives her a look.

KAI
From... from...

NERGUI
The Gokhan does not need to be
saved. She is the savior.

Kai gasps.

KAI
Nike is... Gokhan?

Bekter enters the tent.

BEKTER
I'm back. I-

He sees Kai. Freezes.

EXT. THE DARK PLAINS, TARGUID CAMP - YEAR 15 - NIGHT

Kai and Bekter stand outside the tent.

Beat.

BEKTER
(in English)
It has been a long time.

KAI
It has.

BEKTER
The last time I saw you, I think
that I said I was going to kill
you.

Bekter shrugs.

BEKTER (CONT'D)
Nike will do this for me. But, I
guess that is why you are here.

Kai nods.

KAI
She has to be stopped.

BEKTER

You cannot stop her. You think that no one tried?

KAI

Nergui said... Nergui called her Gokhan.

Bekter nods.

BEKTER

Perhaps. She believed you were Gokhan, too, and look at how that has turned out.

KAI

So you...

BEKTER

I support her, of course. All those who do not have died.

KAI

...All? You mean-

BEKTER

I mean all. Yes.

Bekter looks at Kai, tears in his eyes.

BEKTER (CONT'D)

This is all that is left of my people. My people, Kai.

KAI

This is all because of me. If I hadn't-

BEKTER

You cannot do this. Much of it is your fault. But... You left the steppe at war, yes, but a survivable one. It was she that did this to us.

KAI

I swear to you, all that is in my power to do, I will do.

BEKTER

And what is in your power?

EXT. TARGUID CAPITAL SQUARE - YEAR 7 - DAY

The capital is a battleground. All of the true warriors left with Kai and Bekter, leaving mostly children and the elderly to fight of Szelanya's hordes.

They aren't doing well.

Lightning streaks across the sky, and Nike leaps into the fray. She cuts down a few barbarians, but it's clear they're not what she's really looking for.

She looks around. Leaps back out of the fight, hovering in the air. Her eyes glow with power.

In the distance, a burst of violet flames. She glides towards it.

EXT. TARGUID CAPITAL OUTSKIRTS - YEAR 7 - CONTINUOUS

Szelanya singlehandedly cuts down a dozen Targuid clanmembers, teleporting around the fight in bursts of flame. Most of them she kills with her sword, but a couple she ignites with her flames.

Nike slams into her, but just as Nike impacts, Szelanya explodes into flames and reappears nearby.

Nike throws a lightning bolt at Szelanya, but she teleports behind Nike and slashes her back.

Nike screams, leaps away, but Szelanya is behind her again. This time Nike ducks the attack and fires bolt of lightning at her, but Szelanya is already gone.

Nike drops to one knee, gasps in pain. She closes her eyes, tries to focus... the wound on her back FLASHES with lightning, searing itself shut.

Nike SCREAMS.

She takes a beat to get her breath back.

She leaps into the air again.

EXT. THE DARK PLAINS - YEAR 7 - DAY

Kai is freaking out at Bekter.

KAI
 (in English)
 They're alone back there, they're
 helpless!

BEKTER
 (in Sukhe)
 Do not lecture me about this! This
 was not my choice!

KAI
 We need to get the soldiers to
 retreat!

Bekter has pity. Puts a hand on Kai's shoulder.

BEKTER
 You must accept, Kai. They are
 alive or they are dead, but it is
 over already. It is out of our
 hands.

KAI
 No. No!

His eyes glow.

BEKTER
 What are you doing?

KAI
 It's not over.

A THUNDERCLAP, and Kai is already half a mile away, skimming
 the surface of the ground at lightning speed.

EXT. TARGUID CAPITAL SQUARE ROOFTOP - YEAR 7 - DAY

Nike surveys the battle from the rooftops. Whether or not she
 can defeat Szelanya, it's clear the city is already lost.

NIKE
 No... no.

A burst of flame. Szelanya puts a hand on her shoulder.

She speaks with a dozen voices at once, but it's all the same
 - like one person speaking in a dozen different moods.

SZELANYA
 There's nothing you can do now.
 Accept defeat.

Nike's eyes crackle, and her lightning dances from her fist.

She spins around, throws a punch at Szelanya, but stops suddenly.

She looks down. There's a sword through her stomach.

She grimaces. Forces herself to stay standing.

Forces herself to glare at Szelanya.

NIKE

When my master returns-

SZELANYA

Your master is already dead.

She puts a hand on Nike's shoulder... and rips the sword out.

Nike blanches, but stays standing.

SZELANYA (CONT'D)

He begged me to spare you, so I promised I would.

Blood pours from Nike's wound. It's all she can do not to collapse.

SZELANYA (CONT'D)

I lied.

She leans in close, whispers into Nike's ear.

SZELANYA (CONT'D)

Accept defeat.

Nike manages to shake her head.

Szelanya scowls, recoils. It's clear this is important to her for some reason.

SZELANYA (CONT'D)

You have no hope. There is no chance of survival, much less victory. Accept defeat.

Nike's voice is a raspy whisper.

NIKE

Kai... forgive...

She drops to her knees.

Szelanya's fury grows. She grabs Nike by the neck and lifts her back into a standing position.

SZELANYA

Say it! Accept defeat!

Nike closes her eyes. Takes a deep breath.

Nike EXPLODES INTO LIGHT. She rises a foot off the ground, three feet, ten. Light dances off her, pours from her wounds as they seal themselves up.

The clouds above her dance and twist.

She glows with the light of the sun. She speaks with the voice of thunder.

NIKE

You have failed. Accept defeat.

Szelanya screams, hisses, yells.

The sky darkens, and the ground rumbles.

Szelanya ERUPTS INTO FLAME, and charges into Nike.

Their fight is catastrophic. They twist through the city, soar through the sky, then rocket back to earth.

EXT. FAR FROM THE CITY - YEAR 7 - DAY

Kai pauses in his run. He still can't see the city, but he sees the clouds, the clashing lights streaking through the sky.

He charges forward again.

EXT. TARGUID CAPITAL SQUARE - YEAR 7 - DAY

A small explosion as Szelanya slams Nike to the ground hard enough to leave a small crater.

Nike's light doesn't fade completely, but it does dim.

Szelanya, still wreathed in violet flames, kicks Nike across the square - and with a flash of flames, is standing over her again.

SZELANYA

The city has fallen. Even if you killed me, you would still have lost.

She blasts Nike with flames. Nike screams.

SZELANYA (CONT'D)
Accept defeat!

Nike glares at her.

NIKE
You are-

More flames. Nike screams again.

Szelanya is furious. She howls at Nike as she continues scorching her.

SZELANYA
ACCEPT DEFEAT!

Nike screams, and in a FLASH OF LIGHT...

Disappears.

Szelanya looks where she was. Looks around.

Her flames go out; she's furious, but she's also confused.

A THUNDERCLAP as KAI appears next to her.

He throws a few lightning bolts at her, which she deftly dodges.

KAI
(in Sukhe)
Where is she?

Szelanya stares at him, angry, confused... then gives him a sly smile.

SZELANYA
(in English)
I killed her. You'll find what's left of her coating my feet.

Kai stares at her, her words taking a beat to sink in.

SZELANYA (CONT'D)
She begged me to spare you. I told her I would.

She erupts into flame again.

The fury starts to hit Kai.

SZELANYA (CONT'D)

I lied.

EXT. TARGUID CAPITAL SQUARE - YEAR 7 - MORNING

Kai kneels beside Szelanya's corpse, his sword still sticking through her belly.

He's stoic now, but the dirt caked on his face clearly shows the path of tears.

The battle around him is over. The city is as ruined as it was when Kai and Erik found it in Year 15, only it's currently littered with the dead and wounded.

The WAIL OF MOURNERS can be heard all around.

Bekter wanders through the square, distraught, furious.

He sees Kai. Storms over to him, shoves him over.

BEKTER

(in Sukhe)

Look what you've done to my city!
My walls are shattered, my people
slaughtered!

Kai returns to a kneeling position.

KAI

(quiet, in English)

She killed Nike.

BEKTER

So you know one tiny part of my
pain!

KAI

This is all my fault.

BEKTER

Stop wallowing in the dirt! Face me
like a man!

He grabs Kai by the shoulders, heaves him up to look him in the eyes.

Kai's eyes are broken. He's wracked with despair.

Bekter drops him in disgust.

BEKTER (CONT'D)
 (in English)
 Get out of my city. You are no
 longer welcome here.

Kai looks up at him.

KAI
 Bekter, I'm-

BEKTER
 GET OUT!

Kai gets to his feet.

Looks at Bekter. Bekter's furious.

Kai walks away.

EXT. FOOT OF THE HOLY MOUNTAIN - YEAR 15 - EVENING

Kai stands behind Bekter and Nergui. They look up at a relatively small but extremely steep mountain. Clouds swirl around the mountain's peak.

All around them Sukhe stare in wonder and fear.

BEKTER
 (in Sukhe)
 There.

Kai sighs.

KAI
 (in English)
 So be it.

He steps towards the mountain. Nergui stops him.

NERGUI
 No! You can't interfere with her
 meditations. She'll kill you!

KAI
 (in English)
 I'm going to do a lot more than
 that.
 (in Sukhe)
 This is necessary, Nergui.

NERGUI
 What is necessary? You intend to
 fight her?

She laughs. Kai doesn't.

KAI
If I have to.

Nergui is shocked despite herself.

NERGUI
Bekter. You can't let him do this.

BEKTER
(in English, to Kai)
Even if she does kill us, it's not
your fault. Everything that has
happened-

KAI
(in English)
Has happened because of my
training, and my decisions. It
might not be my fault, but Nike is
my responsibility.
(in Sukhe, to Nergui)
This is my duty.

Nergui stares at him.

NERGUI
Gokhan...

BEKTER
(in Sukhe)
Enough with the Gokhan!

A crowd gathers around them. It doesn't look happy.

KAI
It looks like the rest of your
people aren't so willing to let me
do this.

BEKTER
They don't have a choice.

Bekter draws his sword. The crowd HISSES, and they draw their
own weapons.

BEKTER (CONT'D)
Leave, Nergui. If I-

He looks. Nergui has her own blade drawn.

Bekter smiles.

NERGUI
Go. We'll see you in the next life.

KAI
Bekter, I-

Bekter looks at him. Nods.

BEKTER
(in English)
My breath is yours.

Kai hesitates. Nods.

KAI
My breath is yours.

The crowd moves to fight. Bekter swings his blade, scares them back for the moment.

BEKTER
Now go! Go!

Kai runs up the mountain as the crowd swarms Bekter and Nergui.

EXT. MOUNTAIN LAKE - YEAR 15 - EVENING

A serene lake in a mountain basin, surrounded by trees. Dark fog covers everything, obscuring the far shore. A simple white robe lies on the near shore.

A figure hovers over the surface of the water. The fog expands and contracts with the breathing of the figure; the water, too, pulls away from shore and then rushes back out.

Kai emerges from the trees. His presence sends ripples through the fog and water.

The breathing stops.

Beat.

The figure inhales the fog, taking it all into herself - it's Nike, naked.

She turns to look at Kai. Nods to him.

He nods back.

She walks to the shore, puts on her robe.

NIKE
They wouldn't let you up here
willingly.

KAI
Bekter...

He's at peace with it for the moment, but he still can't say
it.

Nike understands.

NIKE
I'm sorry.

KAI
Me too. For everything.

NIKE
You don't even know everything.

KAI
So tell me.

Nike shakes her head.

NIKE
It's too late for that now. There's
only one way this ends.

KAI
You're wrong.

NIKE
Ever the optimist.

KAI
She told me you were dead. I looked
for you for weeks, but...

NIKE
You have committed many sins.
Leaving me behind was not one of
them.

KAI
I'm not so certain. But thank you.

She nods to him.

KAI (CONT'D)
So how does this work? I'm not
going to throw the first punch.

NIKE

Your presence here is the first punch. This is holy ground.

KAI

Holy to who?

NIKE

You can't feel it? It is holy to no one - and everyone. It is holy because it is. There is a power here to rival that of the Pure White Sea.

Kai closes his eyes. Breathes deep.

He feels it. It's shocking.

KAI

This is... by all the gods, Nike. This is what she had. This is why witches here are so powerful.

Nike nods.

KAI (CONT'D)

If you'd come back... if you'd told us...

NIKE

You could've expanded here? All four of you?

Kai nods. She's right.

KAI

I guess not.

Beat.

NIKE

I don't want to kill you, Kai. If you would just leave...

KAI

I can't do that any more than you can give up the power you've taken.

Nike finally realizes he's right.

NIKE

I... I have Ascended. You're right. But how could I not?! I was all alone!

KAI

I came as soon as I knew you were
alive!

NIKE

No, Kai! Before that! You and
Bekter took the entire army with
you, and then...

She cries, but there's a powerful anger behind the tears.

KAI

Nike...

NIKE

What was I supposed to do? You
would rather I'd just let her kill
me?!

KAI

No! Never, Nike! This isn't... you
were in an impossible situation.
This isn't your fault.

NIKE

You know that's not true. It was my
choice! It's always our choice! You
would've let her kill you. Deny it!

KAI

I... I would've. You're right.

NIKE

You're the only one fit to judge
me. I can't even judge myself. Only
you. And you know I choose wrong.
And now you want to kill me for it.

KAI

I don't want to kill you.

NIKE

But you will.

Kai hesitates... but nods.

KAI

If I have to.

NIKE

YOU HAVE TO!

She charges him.

It's not just her eyes and mouth; Nike's skin glows like a sun. Her entire body is on fire, the flames tinged with violet. Here, at the source of her power, she's overwhelming.

Kai can't stop her. He can barely slow her down. Fighting back is so impossible as to be a joke.

So he runs. He bounces between the trees, leaps over the surface of the lake. Nike is always right behind him, but it's better than her being on top of him.

As he leaps over the lake again, Nike is suddenly above him; she blasts him down into the water.

BENEATH THE WATER - CONTINUOUS

The impact knocks Kai unconscious, and the current pulls him ever deeper.

He hits the bottom of the lake.

Beat.

He inhales.

His eyes open.

EXT. MOUNTAIN LAKE - YEAR 15 - EVENING

Nike hovers over the water, watching. She's anxious, afraid.

The water EXPLODES.

Kai soars out of the water. Unlike Nike, he controls his power - light streams from his eyes and mouth, but that's it.

He smashes into Nike, who flies back and hits the shore hard, but on her feet.

The impact knocks Kai back to the opposite shore, where he lands gently.

Nike charges again. This time, Kai doesn't run. He dodges her attacks and strikes back. The blow barely fazes her, but at least his connected.

Nike continues her attack, throwing everything she has into each attack, Kai narrowly avoiding each one, and following with tiny attacks that don't do much, but cumulatively, start to have an effect.

All Nike needs is one hit, though, and when she finally lands it she hits Kai into a tree so hard the tree shatters into splinters.

Nike takes advantage of the moment to gather her power. The fog returns, rushing like a whirlpool all around them. She glows ever brighter.

NIKE

It's over, Kai. Let it end.

Kai gets to his feet, but it's clear the blow broke him. He struggles to stand, wheezes. Blood streams from the numerous places where the wood speared him.

He draws his sword.

NIKE (CONT'D)

Have it your way.

She charges at Kai.

Kai raises the sword.

Thrusts it through his own belly.

Nike stops, surprised, just in front of him.

Before she can react, he grabs her shoulders, holds on with all of his power and strength.

KAI

Let me have it, Nike.

Nike tries to pull back, but Kai holds on tight.

KAI (CONT'D)

Give it to me, Nike. Give me everything.

NIKE

This isn't... what are you-

KAI

Not just the power. I want it all. All of your guilt. All your mistakes.

NIKE

You can't... no, you can't!

KAI

I can't take it, but you can give it to me.

Kai presses his forehead to hers.

KAI (CONT'D)
You don't have to carry this
anymore.

Nike is overwhelmed. A small thread of light flows from her nostrils to his.

KAI (CONT'D)
It isn't your fault, Nike. Not
anymore.

Nike hyperventilates. The light pulses.

KAI (CONT'D)
Let me have everything.

Nike breaks down. Gives him everything.

Light flows like a river from her breath to his. The fog all around them surges into him. The light in her skin fades away as he glows all the brighter.

Finally, she has nothing left. She collapses in tears.

He remains standing only a second longer, then falls back himself.

He wheezes his last breaths.

Nike can barely speak through the sobs.

NIKE
I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

KAI
There's nothing left to be sorry
about.

He breathes out one last time.

The light fades.

Nike crawls to him. Buries her face in his chest. Weeps.

A long beat.

She stills.

She looks up. Her eyes are determined.

EXT. FOOT OF THE HOLY MOUNTAIN - YEAR 15 - NIGHT

Bekter and Nergui, battered and wounded, somehow remain standing.

The crowd around them is nervous - they know they can beat them, but they also know they're not done yet.

NIKE (O.S.)

STOP!

Nike's voice sounds different - weaker, somehow. She's not a god, not anymore.

She leaps from the mountain, lands next to Bekter and Nergui.

Bekter tries to stand off against her, but he can't stop Nike from coming up beside him and supporting him.

Nike breathes on his wounds, and they close up, just a little.

The crowd murmurs, hesitates. Nobody knows what's going on, or what to do.

SUKHE MAN

(in Sukhe)

Gokhan! What is-

NIKE

(to Nergui)

Are you okay?

BEKTER

Where... is he?

Beat.

NIKE

He's... dead.

NERGUI

You...?

Nike shakes her head.

NIKE

No. Yes. He...

She cries again. Nergui is surprised. Everyone is surprised.

Someone in the crowd breaks into wails of loss. Their god is dead.

Nergui collapses in something like relief.

The crowd murmurs.

Bekter comforts Nike. Cries too.

ERLING (O.S.)

This is not a decision to be made lightly. Before you lie two paths, two futures, neither of which intersects with the other.

EXT. BEACH - YEAR 0 - DAY

The aftermath of a violent battle. A young Nike, no older than 14, is bound and on her knees.

Nearby, Erling counsels Kai.

ERLING

On one path, your life continues, much as it did before today, except that you'll always know that it could have been different. If you're wise, you'll learn to give up asking "what-if," but the question won't disappear just because you stop asking it.

He looks at Nike.

ERLING (CONT'D)

The other path... better or worse, it will be harder. Sparing a life is always a mercy, but can be cruel in its own way. And not only to the girl; you must understand, to spare her life could very mean giving up yours.

KAI

I understand-

Erling looks back at him.

ERLING

Suppose you're wrong about her. Suppose she goes on to hurt more people. Suppose she goes on to hurt herself. Hell, even if she doesn't, the girl will still be your responsibility. And ours is not a safe life.

Kai considers.

ERLING (CONT'D)

So before you make your decision,
ask yourself: would you take this
girl's mistakes as your own? Would
you dedicate your life to her? And,
if necessary, would you die for
her?

Kai looks at Nike. Nike looks at him.

He knows the answer.

CUT TO BLACK

THE END