

Today is the day.

I whispered those words like a spell, an anchor against the storm in my mind. Each syllable a nail in the rotten wood of sanity. If I let go of that thought, I would be lost.

Fifteen winters have passed since that cursed night. Fifteen autumns of dry leaves whispering her name in the wind. Fifteen summers scorched without the fire of her laughter. Fifteen barren springs, where her voice has never bloomed again. Time has not washed away the blood. It has not silenced the scream in my gut.

Elanie.

Sweet Elanie, who loved sunflowers  
because she said they were timid suns,  
unable to shine with their full strength.

Who doodled butterflies in the margins of parchments and left verses hidden in the moldy books of the monastery library. Who believed monsters only existed in the songs of minstrels.

Until one of them emerged from the darkness.

Until one of them took her voice. Her innocence. Her life.

The day they found her, the world stopped. They said, "*Death by fall.*" They said, "*Tragic accident.*"

But they didn't say that her body floated in the filth of the river, her skin torn by stone and iron. They didn't say that the Hallenhäuser reeked of dry fear and lies, that the garments of those men were stained with the crimson of her innocent

blood, that their footprints were imprinted in the damp earth as if, until her last breath, she had tried to write her story with her own pain.

They didn't say that her nails were broken, shattered in her desperation to fight back. They didn't say that her linen dress was torn like a profane shroud, that her cheek bore the mark of a slap filled with contempt, that her fragile wrist lay twisted at an inhuman angle, as if even in death they had wanted to break what remained of her.

They didn't say there was mud in her mouth, as if someone had forced her to bite the earth, as if they had tried to stifle her screams in the dust of the road.

They didn't say that her body was not

whole.

A twelve-year-old girl, whose only crime was being born a woman in a land of impunity.

Her body, found in the mud, spoke of the fury and sadism of her executioners. Her teeth shattered by stones, her skull caved in by the weight of barbarism. Her skin burned, marked by the fire of those who sought to erase the evidence of their brutality. Her bones fractured, her humanity reduced to a disposable piece of flesh in the eyes of those who never saw her as a child, but as an object, a broken toy after quenching their thirst for power and violence.

*"Insufficient evidence,"* they said.

*"Defamer,"* they called me.

And so, the murderer walked among us  
once more.

Drinking from golden goblets. Laughing  
beneath the stone roof of his castle.

While my daughter's bones lay cold and  
forgotten in an unmarked grave.

While Elanie's remains became just  
another statistic, a file buried in the dust  
of a system that never saw her, that  
never heard her.

But today.

Today, I will be the storm that devours his  
peace, the scourge of his soul.

In the cabin where I have kept my grief,

upon bare stone, I have built my altar.  
The dust-covered edicts that declared  
his impunity. The names of her  
executioners, written in my own blood.  
Scraps of the tunic my mother once  
sewed for her dowry, now rags defiled by  
death.

At the center, a relic: a charcoal drawing  
made by small, innocent hands. Two  
stick figures beneath a trembling sun.

*"For my brother Darel,"* reads the corner.

Today, justice will not come from their  
cold, corrupt hands.

Today, I will not be the resigned father,  
the grieving brother, the man from whom  
the only pure thing in his existence was  
stolen.

Today, I will be the executioner whom  
their

God forgot to punish.

Today, I will be the judgment that history denied them.

The moon bears witness to my vow.

I ride beneath the cloak of night, my gaze fixed on the fortress where the murderer hides. The cold seeps into my skin, but I do not feel it. Rage is a fire in my veins, a poison that keeps me standing when exhaustion threatens to consume me.

As I reach the village, the people whisper my name.

Some call me madman. Others, heretic. The elders pray for my soul, as if there is still something left in me worth saving.

The young sharpen their daggers on damp stone, exchanging silent glances of resolve.

Tonight, I do not march alone.

They call us ruffians. They call us outcasts. They call us the filth that taints the streets of the righteous.

But tonight, we will be judgment.

The shadows embrace us as we advance, a tide of faceless specters whom history refused to remember. No war horns sound, no glorious hymns rise—only the hush of our footsteps upon the damp earth and the whisper of steel as it is drawn.

The castle gates stand tall, like the fangs of a slumbering beast, blackened by time and the arrogance of its master.

But tonight, there will be no refuge for him—nor for those who protect him.

Darel walks beside me, his hand gripping the hilt of his axe with the same fury with which a man clings to his last breath. His gaze does not waver, does not falter, because he knows that beyond those gates lies the hell that forged us.

*"Today is the day,"* I say, and my voice echoes among our own like thunder in the storm.

The women who march with us—those who were called widows before their time—nod, their faces etched with suffering. Their husbands, their sons, their fathers were taken by the same beast that rests within the fortress. And today, they have

come to collect their debt.

*"Justice will not be ours alone," I continue. "It belongs to those whose cries were silenced by gold, to those whose names have turned to ashes. God has not abandoned the righteous, but neither will He intervene. Tonight, we shall be His hand."*

*"We shall be His punishment!"* someone answers from the crowd, and a roar of pent-up fury rises into the night breeze.

*"Those who stand with him, who protected him, who helped him bury the bodies of our children, our sisters, our brothers... will die! They showed no pity, no mercy—we shall show none either."*

A thunderclap rolls in the distance, but it is

not the sky that speaks. It is the blackened wooden gate, splintering under the fury of our axes and torches.

The blood of the first guards stains the ground before they can even raise their swords. They are not soldiers. They are well-fed dogs who never imagined the forgotten would rise against them.

Inside, the castle awakens to chaos. The halls that once echoed with feasts and hypocritical laughter are now filled with screams. There is no escape.

I advance, the rage of fifteen years devouring me from within. Every blow I strike is for Elanie. Every life I take is payment for hers.

History will not remember our names, but

tonight, in this place, justice will no longer be an empty word.

The doors burst open with a thunderous crash—and there he is.

My daughter's murderer.

He doesn't look like a monster. He has no claws, no fangs, no skin covered in ash like the demons of old tales. No. He is just a man. A man with a belly swollen from feasting, fingers heavy with golden rings, the face of someone who has never felt the weight of guilt.

He doesn't look like a monster.

But he is.

He clings to his goblet, as if the wine might

save him from the storm he has unleashed.

*"You..."* he breathes my name, his voice cracking.

The soldiers step in behind him, armed and ready. But their eyes betray them. They know this fight is futile.

Outside, the torches burn like wraiths, and the screams of the condemned still echo through the halls.

*"Guards!"* his voice shatters. *"Kill him! Now!"*

No one moves.

A thunderclap rumbles in the distance. The castle walls are crumbling—just like

his power. The soldiers lower their weapons.

*"I'm sorry, my lord,"* one murmurs before stepping back.

The noble swallows hard, his eyes darting in desperation.

He, who always held control, who dictated fates with a signature or a whisper in the court, is now just a man facing the judgment he thought would never come.

I step forward, my shadow stretching across the marble.

He grips the table, takes a deep breath, and—in an act of cowardice masked as false bravado—he smiles.

*"All this... for a dead bitch?"*

The world stops. A brutal silence falls over the room.

*"Did you think she was special?" he laughs, spitting out words that cut into my skin like daggers "She wasn't the first... and she won't be the last."*

I freeze.

*"Do you want to know the funniest part?"* he tilts his head with a venomous smile  
*"She didn't even scream enough."*

The hatred in my veins ignites. It burns through my chest like a spear of fire. The world stops. Those words aren't just an insult. They are a wildfire consuming my bones. I close my eyes, and I see her.

Elanie.

Not her laughter. Not her hair waving in the wind. Not the little girl who once ran into my arms after a nightmare.

No.

Only her body floating in the river. Her bluish skin. Her slightly parted lips. Her empty eyes.

Something inside me breaks.

I lunge at him with blind fury, but in an act of cowardice disguised as bravery, my daughter's murderer leaps over the table and grabs a silver knife. With the desperate skill of a cornered rat, he plunges it into my side.

The pain is sharp, searing, but insignificant compared to the emptiness he has left in

me. I tear the knife from his hands and throw it away. He staggers back, gasping, his eyes wide, now he's afraid, now he understands what it means to look death in the eyes.

My hands close around his throat, and I slam him against the table. His skin trembles under my fingers. His hands claw at my arms, his legs kick, he clings to life as if he deserves mercy.

*"Tell me, nobleman,"* I whisper, leaning in until only he can hear me *"Will you scream enough?"*

His face contorts in panic, I squeeze harder, and in the final moment, as his body convulses in one last desperate plea for air, I see her again.

Elanie. Her laughter, her voice, her childhood hugs. But it's only a flicker. Because I know he was right. I will always remember her this way. Always.

The killer's body falls to the floor with a dull thud. I take a deep breath. But the air is no longer enough. Killing him should have brought me peace. But there is no peace. No relief. Only the ashes of what I once was.

The silence he leaves behind is deafening. The pressure in my side intensifies. When I look down, I see the dark stain spreading across my clothes, hot and sticky. The knife... I hadn't felt it before. Not with the rage consuming me.

But now... now everything feels heavy.

My legs give out. The floor rises to meet me, and the entire room blurs. I hear distant voices, someone calling my name, but it sounds so far away, like they are calling from the other side of a river impossible to cross.

I blink, and I am no longer in the castle.

I am in an open field, vast and endless, where the tall golden grass sways with the breeze, like an ocean of fire under the gentle touch of a kind sun. Not the scorching midday sun nor the one setting with melancholy on the horizon, but one that seems made only for me, warm and comforting, embracing me like a hug I had long forgotten.

The air is fresh, pure, carrying the intoxicating scent of wildflowers scattered

across the plain. Lavender, jasmine, honeysuckle... sweet and soft notes blending with the faint perfume of the earth after the rain. I hear the murmur of a nearby stream, its crystal-clear waters gliding over smooth stones, singing with the serene voice of water that never stops moving.

The sky is an infinite canvas of blue, vast and clear, with white clouds floating like tufts of cotton. Birds flutter above, their harmonious songs mingling with the whisper of the wind. In the distance, a weeping willow leans gracefully toward the stream, its long branches touching the water's surface with the tenderness of a mother caressing her sleeping child.

I walk barefoot over the grass, feeling the softness of the earth beneath my feet, so

light, so real... and for the first time in years, my chest isn't weighed down by the burden of anger.

No war. No death. No screams.

Just the steady heartbeat of this place and then, a laugh. Clear, light, so pure that it stops me in my tracks. My eyes search for her before my mind even processes it, before my heart can grasp the impossible and there she is.

*"Dad."*

My heart stops I turn slowly, afraid it's all a cruel illusion. But she is there.

Elanie. Not with the withered face of memory, not with cold skin and colorless lips.

No.

It's her, with her blue dress billowing in the wind, with her cheeks flushed with laughter, with her eyes full of light. She approaches with soft steps, as if afraid I might vanish at her touch.

*"Dad, you're here."*

Her voice is the same as always, that sweet melody I had feared I would forget.

*"Elanie..."* my voice breaks.

I try to move closer, but my body feels heavy. She notices and holds me with her small hands, just as she did when she was little, running to me after a nightmare.

*"It's okay, Dad,"* Elanie whispers, and the lump in my throat tightens until I can barely breathe. *"You don't have to carry it anymore."*

Her voice is both a balm and a knife.

*"I did it, my love... I did it..."*

*"I know,"* she says, and her cold fingers touch my cheek with a tenderness that shatters me.

I realize I am crying.

*"But you don't have to stay here."*

Elanie.

The warmth of her hand fades like a summer breeze, leaving an emptiness that

hurts more than any wound.

*"No... Elanie..."*

My voice is barely a broken whisper. I blink, and when my eyes refocus, she is not alone.

Beside her, in the endless field, there are more girls. Dozens. Hundreds. They stretch as far as the eye can see, a sea of small souls that should never have been here. Their faces are different, but their gazes are the same.

Some have braided hair with faded ribbons; others have wild curls, unevenly cut strands. Some wear tattered party dresses, others simple nightgowns that didn't shield them from the cold when they needed it most. Some clutch worn-out

dolls, pressing them against their chests as if they could still find refuge in them. Others keep their hands clenched into fists, tiny nail marks embedded in their palms—scars of a lost battle and suddenly, I feel it. Everything they felt before they were torn from this world.

The paralyzing terror, the cold that seeped into their bones when no one answered their cries, the pleas that died in their throats. The loneliness, the certainty that no one was coming. Each of them was stolen by the same hands I stained with blood today. Each of them cried in the darkness while the monster devoured them. Each of them died afraid and yet, here they are, watching me, waiting for me.

Elanie smiles at me, but in her eyes,  
there is a gleam that cuts deeper than  
any

wound.

*"You heard us, Dad."*

My breath shatters, the girls step forward in unison, and their faces no longer hold terror. No longer hold anguish.

*"You avenged us."*

*"You remembered us."*

*"You gave us justice."*

One by one, their voices join, soft as autumn leaves rustling in the wind and then, they all smile. Not with happiness, but with peace with gratitude. With a smile that tells me that, for the first time in a long time, they are safe.

But not all are at peace. Some still tremble, lingering in the shadows of their stolen childhood and I know I am not done yet.

Not while there are more girls out there. More trapped souls screaming in a world that pretends not to hear them. More monsters waiting in the dark and until the last one falls

Only then, and only then, will I rest.