

GOKHAN

written by

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EXT. THE PURE WHITE SEA - YEAR 15 - DAY

A man stands on the surface of an endless ocean.

VOICE (V.O.)

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

The man is KAI, 39. His greying beard is long, but not unkempt; his skin is leather.

VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

On one path, your life continues,  
much as it did before today, except  
that you'll always know that it  
could have been different.

Kai closes his eyes, breathes deep. The wind and the sea around him rage.

VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

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.

Kai releases his breath. The water calms.

VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Now, the other path...

Behind him, a small boat with blue sails crests the horizon.

VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

...Better or worse, it will be  
harder.

EXT. THE BOAT - YEAR 15 - DAY

The boat drifts, sails furled.

Kai sits on the edge of the boat, his back to the water.

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 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. It's his voice we heard earlier.

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  
Not just 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.

Kai chuckles.

KAI  
I recall.

Beat.

ERLING  
Kai, I know how you must feel-

KAI  
You don't.

Beat. Kai walks away.

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. All over, there's the Varangian sigil: a cloud with crossed lightning bolts.

If there were more than a dozen people around, it would be impressive; as it is, it just looks abandoned.

Kai and Erling stand near the edge of the temple. They watch August as she cleans one of the statues.

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 yields.

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.

ERIK, 33, in a corner booth, drinking and laughing with a few friends. His skin is almost as red as his hair.

Kai moves over to the booth. Erik sees him, and breaks out in another bout of laughter.

ERIK  
 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, amused.

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

KAI  
No.

Erik pours Kai a tall glass of wine.

KAI (CONT'D)  
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 two of them stand out in the street. The mood has taken a heavy shift towards dour.

ERIK  
You can't honestly believe it.

KAI  
I can't afford not to.

ERIK  
You told me she was dead. You said  
saw her die.

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

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. If it is her.  
I don't think I'd be able to... I  
couldn't 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.

EXT. DOCK - DAY

Erling and Erik mend fishing nets, with a few others mending  
nets around them.

Erling nods, solemn

ERLING  
It's true.

ERIK  
Gods above and below. I didn't  
think... I mean, who could have  
expected this?

ERLING  
None of us. Least of all Kai.

Erik nods.

ERIK  
So he's definitely going, then?

ERLING  
I've given up trying to stop him.

Erik shakes his head.

ERIK  
At least he'll have August with  
him.

Erling shakes his head definitively.

ERLING  
Not if I can help it.

Erik gives him a plaintive look.

ERIK  
You can't expect him to go out  
there alone.

ERLING  
Maybe not. But I can't let him take  
another apprentice out there  
either.

Erik looks at him. Considers.

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

Kai and August are both meditating.

The door opens. August opens her eyes.

It's Erik.

August nudges Kai. He opens his eyes, looks at Erik.

ERIK  
I'll come with you.

He leaves.

Kai takes a breath.

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 rolls her eyes.

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 an equal.

Kai grimaces.

Beat.

KAI

I don't want you to come.

AUGUST

What?

Kai stands, paces.

KAI

Don't do this, it's hard enough-

AUGUST

You can't expect me to stay behind!

KAI

I can and do. I will not let you follow me there!

AUGUST

Why not? Why not?

KAI

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

Beat. Kai calms down.

KAI (CONT'D)

That isn't going to 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 turns around, puts a hand on her shoulder.

KAI

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

AUGUST

You're just doing this because you think it's your fault, but-

KAI

It is my fault. But even if it wasn't, Nike was my apprentice. She was my friend. I owe it to her.

August tears up, turns her head to hide it.

AUGUST

You jackass.

Beat. August sighs.

AUGUST (CONT'D)

I guess someone needs to keep an eye on Erling.

Kai smiles. She smiles too.

They're sad smiles.

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. 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 sadder.

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 (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 (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.

Kai opens his eyes.

KAI  
Having trouble?

Nike doesn't open her eyes.

NIKE  
No.

Kai waits.

Nike opens her eyes.

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

She pauses, 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. THE STEPPE - YEAR 15 - DAY

Kai and Erik ride through the steppe.

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 was the plan.

Kai shakes his head.

KAI  
We're gonna do our best to 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.

He crests a hill, and stops. Stares.

Erik catches up, sees Kai staring. Stops.

ERIK  
See something?

Kai doesn't respond.

ERIK (CONT'D)  
Kai?

Kai comes to. Shakes his head.

ERIK (CONT'D)  
Is everything okay?

KAI  
It's 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 where he was staring earlier.

KAI  
A lot can change in eight years.

FADE TO:

THE SAME PLACE - YEAR 7 - EVENING

Kai and Nike stand on the same hill, looking at 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  
 (in English)  
 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  
 Not all Sukhe, or not all  
 outsiders?

KAI  
 Just try not to look tasty.

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

He and Nike approach. Kai leads their horses to the Sukhe's,  
 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, talking at her  
 in 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 is a 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.

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  
 (in Sukhe)  
 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 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 KHAGAN, 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. THE STEPPE - YEAR 15 - NIGHT

Kai and Erik sit next to a campfire.

Both of them laugh heartily.

ERIK  
Right? Right?

Kai nods, still laughing.

KAI  
She did! She had been under the  
boat the entire time, pulling at  
his net.

A break for more laughter. Kai composes himself enough to continue.

KAI (CONT'D)  
I still don't know where she got  
all the boots!

Another burst of laughter.

A breeze blows through the camp. Kai freezes, instantly solemn.

It takes Erik a beat to realize, then he freezes, still with half a smile.

ERIK  
What? What is it?

KAI  
Listen.

The CRACKLING of the fire.

The WHISPER of the wind.

A strange SHUFFLING.

Erik's smile disappears. He's ready.

All at once, Kai and Erik are on their feet. Erik has his sword in his hand, and Kai has one hand outstretched, fire and lightning dancing across his fingers and down his forearm.

A shrill BATTLE CRY, and a dozen SUKHE WARRIORS charge at them from a nearby hill.

KAI (CONT'D)  
I'll handle this.

Kai waves his hand, and there's a brilliant FLASH.

As the light fades, he's surprised to see the warriors continuing their charge.

Erik steps between him and the closest, deflecting the attacker's blade and slapping him in the chest. A FLASH and a THUNDERCRACK, and the warrior flies back.

Kai, wits back about him, ducks the next attack, disarms the warrior, and then cuts him down with his own sword.

Kai charges in between the remaining four, dancing easily between their attacks while Erik circles them, harrying them with his blade.

It only takes a moment for them to finish dispatching the warriors.

They breathe heavily. Look at each other.

ERIK  
"You'll handle it."

KAI  
The last time I was here, even the warriors on my side were scared of that.

ERIK  
They weren't scared now.

Beat.

KAI  
They've seen it before. It, or worse.

Neither of them like the implications.

EXT. THE STEPPE - YEAR 15 - MORNING

Erik examine several horses tied to stakes, while Kai digs through leather bags set in a pile.

ERIK  
Anything helpful?

KAI  
It doesn't make any sense. This one was clearly a Targuid - that's Bekter's clan - but the others are...

He gestures at similarly ransacked bags lying around him.

KAI (CONT'D)  
Harun, Darga, Nailood... It doesn't make any sense.

ERIK  
Why, exactly?

Kai stands.

KAI  
The Harun and the Darga together, that's the most reasonable. They're separated enough geographically, they're not really friends or enemies. I don't know how they'd meet, but they should get along okay if they did. But the Nailood have been at war with the Harun for decades at least, and the Targuid follow a separate religion that should put them at war with all three.

ERIK  
So they're outcasts. Mercenaries, maybe.

KAI  
Carrying their clan sigils? Not  
outcasts. Mercenaries is possible,  
but if that's the case, why are  
they here? Why not in Solidus, or  
Tael?

Erik grimaces.

ERIK  
They were on their way?

KAI  
And here's another thing. They  
weren't hungry.

He opens one of the smaller bags. Dried meats. He grabs  
another bag, opens it - it's full of something like stew.

ERIK  
Tell me they have some wine. I'll  
even drink beer.

Kai opens a skin, gives it a sniff. Nods. Tosses it to Erik.

KAI  
They have all the supplies they  
need. And we're clearly not  
wealthy. Why attack us?

Erik takes a sniff of the skin. Recoils.

ERIK  
What is this?

KAI  
Milk-wine.

ERIK  
You drink this shit?

KAI  
It's fine.

Erik takes another whiff. He is very uncertain, but takes a  
drink.

ERIK  
So they wanted our horses.

KAI  
It's the only thing that makes any  
sense, but it still doesn't make  
enough.

Beat.

ERIK

You think they were running. From her.

Kai looks at him, doesn't respond.

ERIK (CONT'D)

The enemy of my enemy. That's why they were together. They recognized you, somehow, knew you were like her. That's why they attacked.

KAI

No. No. If they feared her that much, why attack us at all? Why not run away?

ERIK

Any way you cut it, it doesn't look good for us.

Kai nods.

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. Divine king.

KAI  
I'd translate it divine chief.

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. Our  
*bomo* have power, but... different  
power.

Nike's interested.

NIKE

What about the witch, then? Is she-

KAI

Witches are the same anywhere.

Bekter looks at Nike, then Kai. The mention of "the witch" caught his attention.

KAI (CONT'D)

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.

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 lounges on some furs.

NIKE

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

Kai sighs.

NIKE (CONT'D)

Sorry! Divine chief.

She mock 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 down by the fire.

KAI (CONT'D)  
Regardless. It's time to meditate.

Nike doesn't move.

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

Nike looks at him.

NIKE  
I don't want to.

Kai snorts.

KAI  
I don't care if you want 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)  
The further we are from the Sea,  
the more I feel... it.

KAI  
The Sea?

NIKE  
Power. I feel powerful. I know I  
can still do everything I ever  
could and more, and I don't need  
the Sea to do it.

Her eyes glaze over, just for a second, then she's back.

She looks at Kai, scared. He's sad, but stoic.

NIKE (CONT'D)  
I follow my breath, and it's there.  
It's in me.

KAI  
It's in all of us, Nike.

She's surprised.

NIKE  
But I thought...

Kai nods.

KAI  
I feel it too. I fight it every  
day.

NIKE  
But you've never Ascended.

KAI  
Neither have you. Not really.

Nike shakes her head.

NIKE  
How could you know?

She has tears in her eyes.

Kai puts his hands on her shoulders.

KAI

Ascension isn't like a hole in your soul's fabric, that you can stitch over. It's poison in your soul's well. Everything you touch from then on is tainted. You'd have to drain it all and start over new.

NIKE

Can you do that?

Kai shakes his head.

KAI

Not... no. But that's how I know you haven't ascended. I've seen you. I've trained you. I've even learned from you.

Nike starts crying.

NIKE

But I... I tried, Kai. I really wanted to.

Kai embraces her. She cries into his shoulder.

KAI

You didn't understand then. You do now.

EXT. FIELD OF BODIES - YEAR 15 - EVENING

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

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

ERIK

Now we know what worse they've seen.

KAI

Possibly.

Erik's incredulous.

ERIK  
Possibly? It was her, without  
doubt.

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.

KAI  
But we're not at the sea.

ERIK  
And if she's Ascended, she wouldn't  
care. She wouldn't even notice.

KAI  
Even so, fifty men-

ERIK  
Kai.

Beat.

KAI  
I'm only saying it's possible she  
wasn't acting alone.

Erik grimaces.

ERIK  
Are you so blind? You think I don't  
want to believe this is all some  
big misunderstanding?

KAI  
I know it's not... I know it isn't  
likely. But it's possible.

Erik lets out a breath.

ERIK  
It's *possible*.

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  
When I saw him last-

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. We've been out  
here months already.

KAI

The steppe is large. The pace out here is slow. We'll find her, but it'll take time.

ERIK

Maybe. But I didn't sign up to just wander aimlessly around the plains, hoping to accidentally bump into Nike before I die of old age.

KAI

No, you signed up for a pleasant hunting trip with plenty of wine and the occasional woman.

Erik snorts. He's still mad, but he's amused, too.

ERIK

I wouldn't say no to some dice, either.

Kai smiles.

Beat. Erik sighs.

ERIK (CONT'D)

Alright. We'll do it your way for now. But if we don't find more of that nasty milk-wine soon, my good humor is going to fade.

He walks away. Kai chuckles.

Beat. Kai stares intently at the fire.

KAI

Bekter... What I wouldn't do...

EXT. CATTLE FIELDS - YEAR 7 - DAY

Bekter stands, watching his people work with the cattle and the horses.

Kai walks up to stand next to him. They watch Nergui teach Nike how to milk a yak.

Nergui, frustrated, corrects Nike's method of squatting next to the yak. Nike doesn't get why this is so important.

Kai chuckles.

KAI  
 (in Sukhe)  
 I'd forgotten how little I knew  
 when I came out here.

Bekter laughs.

BEKTER  
 (in Sukhe)  
 You say that like you know anything  
 now.

Kai laughs.

Beat.

KAI  
 I wanted to talk to you about-

BEKTER  
 (in English)  
 I know why you are here.

Kai looks at him.

BEKTER (CONT'D)  
 I did not think the Varangians came  
 so far anymore.

KAI  
 (in English)  
 They... We don't. I do.

Kai puts a hand on Bekter's shoulder.

KAI (CONT'D)  
 I always will.

Bekter shrugs Kai's hand off.

BEKTER  
 I hoped you would not.

Kai takes a step back.

KAI  
 What?

BEKTER  
 This is not 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. He digests the information.

BEKTER (CONT'D)

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

KAI

What do you mean?

BEKTER

War, Kai. I have 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 are hunting is not neutral. If you kill her...

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 herd, and I will give it to you. But this thing? To kill this witch? That alone I cannot allow.

EXT. YAKS - YEAR 7 - CONTINUOUS

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. Nergui mutters relief in Sukhe.

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 walks away.

EXT. CATTLE FIELDS - YEAR 7 - CONTINUOUS

Kai leaves Bekter to head over to Nike, and passes by Nergui as he does. He stops, nods towards 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.

Kai continues over to Nike.

EXT. YAKS - YEAR 7 - CONTINUOUS

Kai squats next to Nike. He's not pleased.

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 stops milking.

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

KAI  
Maybe he does. But we certainly  
know something he doesn't.

NIKE  
The witch.

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

Nike continues milking.

Beat. Kai 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 wipes her brow.

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.

Kai takes a deep breath. Nods.

KAI  
Two weeks.

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 violet.

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  
Oh, Erik. I wish I could. But my  
task binds me here like an anchor.

KAI  
Then let us help you! If there's  
work here-

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

NIKE  
You have done enough damage for a  
lifetime, Kai! What do you hope to  
accomplish this time?

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. 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)

We're done here.

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. 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.

Nike sits nearby, listening.

BEKTER  
(in Sukhe)  
He is not Gokhan.

SUKHE PRIEST  
(in Sukhe)  
All of the prophecies-

BEKTER  
Don't talk to me about prophecies.  
Half the prophecies apply to my  
mother.

SUKHE PRIEST  
And all of the prophecies apply to  
him.

Bekter groans.

BEKTER  
I am your khan. I am your khagan.

The priest bows gently.

SUKHE PRIEST  
And I will serve you, of course.  
But you are bound to serve-

Bekter glares at him.

SUKHE PRIEST (CONT'D)  
You are called to aid the Gokhan.

BEKTER  
And if I don't? What will you do?

The priest bows deeper this time.

SUKHE PRIEST  
My duty is still to you, khan.

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. 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 at a thin 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. 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  
Szelanya. 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. I had to  
stay very far.

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  
 for this, 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 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  
Did she.

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

KAI (CONT'D)  
Nike!

And suddenly she's there too, a 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)  
Tell me about Szelanya.

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 arguing. Nike looks back. It's hard to make out what they're saying until Bekter yells:

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)  
 (to himself)  
 Because why wouldn't he have 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  
 I don't think he's home.

KAI  
 No.



Kai stops too. Takes it all in.

KAI (CONT'D)  
Storms, Erik. This brings back  
memories I'd hoped were lost.

ERIK  
What could have done this?

Kai laughs a sad laugh.

KAI  
What did this? Me.

Erik's surprised.

ERIK  
What? You mean...

KAI  
I mean this is how I left it. I'd  
hoped...

Beat.

ERIK  
Kai. I need to know what happened.

Beat. Kai nods.

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 he wishes she wasn't.

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  
To develop a cult around yourself  
is practically the definition of  
witchery, Ascension or no. No. No!  
There has to be another way.

NIKE  
You're the one who taught me that  
witches crave power above  
everything. But 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 witchery. If anyone  
knows that, I do. 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

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 shakes his head.

ERIK (CONT'D)

It's not your fault. 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... end things.

Beat. Kai fights back tears. Erik supports him.

ERIK (CONT'D)

We're gonna do everything we can to save her, Kai.

Kai nods, struggles to control his voice.

KAI

Thank you. Thank you.

Beat.

They're both alert.

KAI (CONT'D)

She's here.

Erik catches movement at the last second; he shoves Kai to the ground.

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.

Erik coughs.

ERIK

Nike...

Nike strokes his cheek, whispers to him.

NIKE

Quiet now. The far shore beckons.

ERIK

The far shore...

Nike leans in, kisses him.

Erik's eyes close.

Nike looks at Kai, who is still in shock.

Nike's tears are replaced by fury.

NIKE

You did this. You did this to him.

Kai's eyes fill with tears.

KAI

We don't have to-

NIKE

We do now. Because of you.

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

KAI

Nike, don't!

There's an urgency to his cry.

Nike laughs.

NIKE

Don't...? Ascend? Now, you're going to try to save me?

Her mood darkens.

NIKE (CONT'D)

Where was this eight years ago?  
Where were you when that witch  
split me open like a clam?



Kai is heartbroken.

KAI

It... It's not too late. I'm sorry for what I did. Let me make amends. Come back to us. Come back to me.

NIKE

Not too late?

She considers. Genuinely.

NIKE (CONT'D)

Maybe... maybe that's true. Maybe I could return. Abandon the steppe.

Beat. She steels her resolve.

NIKE (CONT'D)

But also true is this: I have neither the reason nor the desire.

Kai closes his eyes, tight. Takes a deep breath.

KAI

So this is it.

Kai readies himself. His eyes glow with power, and white fire dances from his closed fists.

Nike glares daggers at Kai. Her voice aches with betrayal.

NIKE

I loved you like a father.

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)

I listened to every word you said.

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)

For what? Have you accomplished anything? Are you proud of what you've done?

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 gasps, sucks in air.

ERIK

(weak)

Nike... Why....

He rolls over, struggles to stand, but can't quite.

Nike floats through the air, lightning streaming from her skin; neither she nor Kai notice Erik.

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.

Her voice is sad... wistful.

NIKE

I am sorry, you know.

KAI

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

Now she's furious.

NIKE

You think I want this? If I don't  
kill you, you'll kill me!

KAI

I don't want to kill you!

Erik is standing now, hunched over, teeth gritted.

ERIK

(strained)  
I already told you...

Erik FLASHES into Nike, SLAMS her into a wall.

Kai falls to all fours, gasps for breath.

Erik pins Nike to the wall; lightning pours from his hand as  
he readies the killing blow.

Nike's in tears, but still angry. Betrayed.

ERIK (CONT'D)

...I'd be the one to...

She screams; Erik releases his lightning bolt.

A tremendous FLASH, and Nike's gone.

The last bit of energy leaves Erik's body. He collapses.

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 are some 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 immortal. 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 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.

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 looks around. No sign of Kai.

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.

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 (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.

They stop in front of the tent.

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  
 Kai.

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? I'd have no choice but to kill you if I even thought you might Ascend. No, this is the right choice.

He sighs. Looks into the distance, towards a lone mountain.

KAI (CONT'D)

Besides. Suppose we fail. You'll be the last line of defense the clan has.

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 swarm of barbarians.

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 with a flash of lightning so loud it scares even Bekter's men.

Kai doesn't look happy.

Bekter 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... look at this.

He gestures. 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. 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  
(to himself)  
What is this? Why are they here?

The Sukhe glare at him. They're not happy to see an outsider, 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)  
Is this 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.

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  
 And you go anyway. There is honor  
 in that. 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 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  
I should probably 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 out at the tents around them, tears in his eyes. There can't be more than ten thousand people here - a lot to be in one place, certainly, but not a lot for a civilization.

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

No. You cannot take this on yourself. 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 off Szelanya's hordes.

They aren't doing well.

Lightning streaks across the sky - 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 and Bekter scream at each other.

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

No, we need to never have left! Now my people are slaughtered, and it's because of you!

KAI

No. No!

His eyes glow.

BEKTER

(in English)

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  
(in Sukhe)  
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. Szelanya's sword has pierced her stomach.

She grimaces. Forces herself to stay standing.

Forces herself to glare at Szelanya.

NIKE  
(in English)  
When my master returns-

SZELANYA  
(in English, thick accent)  
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. I  
promised I would.

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

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

SZELANYA (CONT'D)

I lied.

Nike's voice is a raspy whisper.

NIKE

Kai... forgive...

She drops to her knees.

Szelanya grins viciously. She grabs Nike by the neck and lifts her back into a standing position.

Szelanya pulls back her sword to strike the killing blow.

SZELANYA

Death embraces you!

Nike closes her eyes. Takes a deep breath.

Nike EXPLODES INTO LIGHT; Szelanya flies backwards from the force. Nike 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 violet flames. 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 fire, 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)

But then, if you'd killed me, I  
would not be able to do this.

Nike glares at her.

NIKE

You are-

More flames. Nike screams again.

Kai soars into view, close enough to see, but not close enough to help.

Szelanya is enraptured. She howls with laughter as she continues scorching Nike.

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)

What have you done?

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

SZELANYA

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  
crushed beneath them!

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. You never were.

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. Kai looks up at a relatively small but extremely steep mountain; Bekter and Nergui avert their gaze. Clouds swirl around the mountain's peak.

All around them Sukhe stare in wonder and fear, all of them careful to look only at Kai, not the mountain.

BEKTER  
 (in Sukhe)  
 There.

Kai sighs.

KAI  
 (in English)  
 So be it.

He steps towards the mountain. Nergui stops him.

NERGUI  
 No! To even look at the mountain for too long is death.

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

Nergui is shocked despite herself.

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

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. Maybe  
 you're right. Maybe it's not 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, right?

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.

She turns to look at Kai. Nods to him.

He nods back.



She walks to the shore, puts on her robe.

NIKE  
You got past my soldiers.

KAI  
Bekter is...

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

Nike understands.

NIKE  
I'm sorry. You were never supposed to be in this place.

KAI  
I'm sorry too. For everything.

NIKE  
You don't know everything.

KAI  
So tell me.

Nike shakes her head.

NIKE  
It's too late for that now.

KAI  
You're wrong.

NIKE  
Ever the optimist.

KAI  
She told me you were dead. I saw her kill you.

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

KAI  
I'm not so certain.

Beat.

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 gets angry.

NIKE

You were the one who taught me to follow your breath. Are you so blind to your surroundings?

Kai hesitates. Closes his eyes. Takes a deep breath.

He SEES the swirling violet flames that fill the lake. The entire mountaintop is corrupted.

He gasps.

KAI

Nike, what is this? Where did it come from?

Nike's shell cracks.

NIKE

I tried, Kai. I tried so hard. But the power was overwhelming... I couldn't hold it all myself.

KAI

By all the gods and then some. You... you did this?

Nike nods.

KAI (CONT'D)

You've been... pouring it out.

NIKE

When I...

It's hard for her to say it.

NIKE (CONT'D)

When I Ascended, I didn't... I couldn't face you. There was so much darkness welling up inside of me. But I thought, if I get rid of it, if I can just... fix it, I could come back.

Kai is in anguish.

NIKE (CONT'D)

But it flows like a river, and it grew faster by the day. The more I emptied it, the more there was. And then they started coming...

KAI

They?

NIKE

The power draws witches like moths to a flame. I had Ascended, I knew, but better it be in my hands than theirs. I fought off the first ones myself, but when they came with their armies, I needed an army of my own.

KAI

Everything... the Sukhe you have here, setting yourself up as Gokhan... you're protecting the mountain.

NIKE

By the time I'd realized what I'd become, it was too late to do anything but embrace it. We played at the role before, but I am... I am a god, now.

Her declaration tramples over any hope Kai had.

KAI

No! If you'd come back! If you'd told us!

NIKE

What could you have done? Killed me sooner?

Kai nods, if reluctantly.

Beat.

NIKE (CONT'D)

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

What was I supposed to do?! Yes, I  
Ascended. 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

You would rather I'd just let her  
kill me?!

KAI

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 rather  
than do this to yourself. Deny it!

Kai grimaces

KAI

I... I can't.

NIKE

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 the sun. Her entire body is on fire, the flames tinged with violet. Here, at the well 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.

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, smashes into Nike.

Nike flies back and hits the shore hard, but on her feet.

Kai soars 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 blow, 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 peacefully.

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.

NIKE

You can't... no, you can't! There's too much!

KAI

Give me everything.

Kai presses his forehead to hers.

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

Nike is overwhelmed. A small thread of violet 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. Even the water from the lake rushes into his mouth.

The light in Nike's skin fades away as he glows all the brighter.

Finally, Nike has nothing left. A thin golden strand drifts from Kai's mouth and up her nostrils, and she collapses in exhaustion.

Kai remains standing only a second longer, then falls next to her, his skin burning off in violet flames.

Nike can barely speak.

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

KAI  
There's nothing left to be sorry  
about.

He breathes out one last time; his body disintegrates, burned to ash.

Nike 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. Nergui is surprised. Everyone is surprised.

Nergui collapses in something like relief.

The crowd murmurs.



Bekter embraces Nike. She sobs.

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

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)

Now, 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 well mean giving up yours.

KAI

I understand-

Erling looks back at him. His glare cuts Kai off.

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