

bone morþor æle hrīm

Blood has seeped into the icefield, staining the mottled white carmine. The smell of iron lingers in the air, a dirge for a dying animal. The ice here will hold its color until the remains of life freeze over. Nothing lasts on the ice. Everything dies and is forgotten.

You are no exception.

With the last of your willpower, you drag yourself towards the loose patch of snow you saw several meters away. Within seconds, you bury your face into the chilled bank, flesh quickly burning against the rime you press your scalp as deep as the snow will allow. Within seconds, you reach ice. There's enough here for what you need. That's all that you needed. Your mouth opens, and the familiar cold seeps into your jaws. You lose feeling there, that is the escape you so desperately sought. Seconds away from choking, there is now the serenity within your body to scream. With a lurch, the remains of your leg are dragged forward. Bone scrapes across the stones and crags of broken ice that lie hidden across the bank. That is common, expected, feared. The second scream is unlucky, as your spittle forced the snow out of your maw, and with the little energy you have left you view spots of crimson spreading across the white. Either your gums or failing, the likely reason, or your humors have begun to fail. Yet none of those drops of red compared to the miles of blood you left behind, dragging your body through the ice and sediment. You are far from safe harbor. You know that, as much as you know this one fact, this one unknowable truth:

You are going to die here. Your name is Val'Keth (*do I put the name here this quickly? Do I even name him?*), you are the last of your expedition, and you are going to die here. You won't see that unknowable truth, you won't put action to the thought, but there it remains. Ignorance is alluring before nature's law. And you will die here.

The corpus is prone to failure in conditions such as these, and your body soon crumples after you drag both of your legs forward. The chill sets in immediately, the numbness a comfort. Weakly, you take stock of the remains of your leg. Pain is an accurate sensation to be sure, but reliance should come from the senses rather than the inherent weakness of the corpus. You must assess the damage. The condition is the same as it was; frozen. There was not enough time for a tourniquet, too much of the sanguine left to suffer under nature's firmament. To save yourself, you turned to the various holes that populated the iceland, and let the remains submerge. Without light to guide you, you had to rely on feeling, the rising lack thereof. You left it in the frozen ichor until feeling was lost from the limb, then you pushed it even further under for good measure. When you finally removed your leg from the cold, veins of ice were slowly weaving their way into your flesh. You couldn't even feel them, but you watched your blood freeze. There was no returning to your campsite, not after what the bastards did. All your weapons, your tools, were left with them. All that was available was your hands. They would work.

You were born a soldier. You were raised a soldier. You amputated your leg as a soldier. To be versed in the taking of a life means that you must have intimate knowledge of the corpus, what organs to puncture, where to cut that will not run dry 'til death. That makes even the most incompetent soldier at least a passing surgeon. Your leg was beyond saving. The flesh was stripped to the bone at the knee, and several cuts could be seen at the knee itself. In the cold, the muscles turned a darker color within minutes. Hours had worsened the condition considerably. Sanguine rarely flowed to these clutches of muscle fibers, letting nothing but loose stretches of choleretic refuse seep through. The leg was dead while the corpus limped on. To keep moriendi at bay, the avenue needed to be removed. The leg had to be surrendered to the ice.

You laid your broken appendage out on the iceland. You placed a stone in your mouth to bite against. You raised your fists up, and drove them low on the bone. The first strike only fractured the bone, puncturing the thin layer of rime encroaching the wound. The stone held. The second strike broke through

the bone, but what was left of the muscles still withheld. You had spend too much time in the frozen ichor. Flesh was frozen to the bone. Tge sound was of the snapping of iron, of force given no location to travel and reverberating endlessly. The stone still held. On the third strike, a fracture shot through the leg. Fresh sanguine began to leak out, drop by singular drop. The veins were frozen, but still held. Your corpus was resisting your progress. The stone broke, alongside your top and bottom right molars, as your fingers dug into the meat of your leg. Your fingernails, sharp, brittle, were the knives needed to cut your leg apart. The pain was unlike anything you had felt before. Iron perfutated your senses. You forced yourself to focus on that, to not succomb to the loss of your senses. You had already fell comatose because of this uselsss leg, never again. You found sinew, pulled. You found bone and squeezes. You ripped through marrow. The sanguine mixed between the gaps you ripped open, making purchase difficult. You had to try again, again. Your screams echoed out across the wastes. Nature ignored you. Perhaps that was the one reason you still live.

Your leg was abanoned where you ripped it clean. After dipping the stump into the same pool to freeze over the wound, you began to drag yourself forward. Now, you lie here.

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Remember your creed. (...?) There is no worse a death than that of inaction, of suicide. A stain, a dark mark. The action cannot be allowed to pass. You must walk. The leather bindings around your hands tightens, the flowing of sanguine slowed to the digits. The corpus must be made a tool to claw your way forward still. Your nails curl against verglas. They crack more, but this matters not. Forward. You must push forward. Never in nearly a thousand years did the (...?) fail. You shall not be the first. There must not be room for doubt. This expanse must be charted. The passage out must be found. It must be burnt away. Muscles strain, fury rises, and one more inch of ground is charted for the (...?). No more attraction must be

made in your direction. There will not be a third scream. If any vile beast finds you, you shall meet it with silence. In silence it shall die. Those screams were but a moment of weakness, and you shall not be weak again. You were not raised to die meekly.

The ice flat is endless, eternal, and nature cares not for your resolve. The frost does not notice those who trudge underneath it, the ysen does not care for the souls it snuffs out. Nature is not alive. Nature is not dead, either: the forces that are killing you do not have the spark of life, they are simply forces. They are at fault, and yet they are do not hold action. They are incapable of even inaction. They simply are, and your death simply shall be. If you stay here. Though your leg has succumbed to nature's will, the rest of your corpus remains mortal, though breached. Even now, ice breaches its way towards cor sanctificatum. Your uniformed has ripped from where you have drug yourself on the chest so far forward. Coarse leather has shriveled under the cold, broken across all you have traveled over. Even now, sediment has dug itself into your chest, permanent additions to your body, contaminants. Bile grows inside your chest cavity. This must be melancholic. Where else would these thoughts of death stem from? You have so many miles to travel. This must not be the end. Forward, cur. Forward.

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The bastards didn't even give you the dignity of death first.

You choke. On impulse, your corpus tries to remove whatever has crawled into your airway. Coughing turns to empty gasps without air. Your jaw lies without feeling as you attempt to move it. Eyelids snap open and are met with blinding pain as something crashes against your eyes. They remain under the lids when they shut close. All that is left to see are blinding spots, swallowed out by the dark. You know these symptoms; asphyxy. You are dying. You are dying. Something clamps against your jaw, pressed against your mouth, holding it shut. Keeping you here, keeping you dying. Then, pressure on your

arms. Forcing you down. You struggle against this, only for pain to erupt in your right shoulder as something makes purchase. Your skin is split. A guttural noise is barked. There are no details to discern, as whatever is coating your throat is trapped around your ears. It's cold. Ice? Crushed ice, sharp. Splinters pierce the roof of your mouth. If you struggle, sanguine will mix with these shards, traveling deeper into your corpus. They will reach your lungs. The passage of breath to cor sanstifum will be obstructed. The humors will cease. Your fingers curl, tracing the bottom of your tabard. Whatever is attempting to murder you in the night came under the negligence of your brothers. They were on watch. They have failed you. You cannot expect any aid from them if they cannot even tell you are under siege.

You kick your legs, striking something. Frail, from the feel. Whatever cut your shoulder is forced deeper, forcing a spasm through your body. Whatever is trying to snuff you out did not anticipate resistance. Pressure falls to your leg as another bark rings against your senses. Something? Someone? Did scavengers find us in the night? No, not possible. You were the only ones visible for tens of miles. The ice fields are flat, plain. Your brothers were better trained than to leave anything unseen. There is only logical leap, and that in itself is illogical.