



Lumresca

Festival of Light and Rebirth



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"A true man of faith does not support the deaths of women and children, for any reason. Always question where you stand, for Jhoras holds your soul in his hands."

-Legatus Albrecht Ludheim, Ordini Soli Obliti, Order of the Forgotten Suns

Several months after the fall of Cathyor, the winter solstice in Porto de la Luce...

Albrecht knelt in front of the altar, feeling the chapel's frozen hardwood floor against the bare flesh of his knees. He was shirtless as well, wearing only his smallclothes, the cold biting deeper than he remembered. Maybe it was the sleepless nights since Cathyor, or the many wounds he'd taken through years of service, or the matters of morality he'd been struggling with of late. Regardless of the cause, he endured it, because confession was the duty of all Jhoras' Anointed.

He gazed at the altar. Three bars and a central pillar, shaped like the three-quartered cross of Jhoras. Each bar represented a realm of his authority: the divine, Innatraea, and the self. Each bar held three candles, making nine for the virtues of the Jhorian Faith. It was here, before the holy symbols, that he would confess.



After some time in utter silence and stillness—he wasn't sure how long, as penance in itself was a form of faith and commitment—one did not count time or pray when waiting upon confession. He heard the door open. There was only one person who would enter while he was here, and so he knew who it was. Rather than looking around or standing, he merely closed his eyes and waited patiently. Every knight of his order had their own little chapel here in the compound, and many sought confession during Lumresca. Perpetua's presence reached him before she spoke.

"Albrecht." Just his name, and already the warmth of her soft voice fell over him like a balm. "Verba tua protecta et amplexa sub Joranem Luminus sunt." *I am here to take your confession. Know that the words you speak are protected, and embraced, under the Light of Jhoras.*

He lowered his head ever so slightly as she walked past him, and laid her confessor's tools on the table near the altar. "Perpetua."

He could feel her gaze upon him, he'd long since become familiar with her movements.

"It has been a long time since your last confession, Albrecht."

"We were deployed in the war against Cathyor."

He knew that she smiled at that, her small subtle one, that meant simple acknowledgement. Her tinder ignited, he could hear its spark, and knew she would be lighting the first candle on the altar's divine bar, it was white for Faith. "Yes... I remember the day that you left."



Not the day that Ordini Soli Obliti had been deployed, but the day that he'd left her. There had been something dangerous in her eyes that day, love; because it had been the night before when she'd asked him if he'd ever leave his order. He had said no. What else could he say? A man did not abandon his faith for comfort, even if it caused pain. Though he still felt something loosen in his chest when she lit that first candle, it meant she would conduct his confession, that she forgave him for her pain. A small mercy against his own, and the desire he had to tell none else what he had to speak of.

Perpetua's voice took on her ritualistic tone, losing some of its warmth. "Juramentum facis verba tua rectitudine honesta et devota sub Joranem Luminus esse?" *Do you swear that what you speak here will be with righteous honesty and devotion under the light of your faith in Jhoras?*

Albrecht spoke solemnly, allowing the weight of his faith to guide him. "Sic juramentum facio, sub Joranem Luminus." *I so swear, under the light of Jhoras.*

"You need not worry, I will respect your choice, and remain ever your friend."

Had his brow furrowed? Did she see something else? Or did she just know him too well? The Innatraean bar of candles must have been lit, because she continued his confession.

"Juramentum facis fortitudine loqui, ut confessiones tuas honore et compassione sub Joranem Luminus affrontes?" *Do you swear to speak with courage, so that you may face your confessions with honor and compassion under the light of your faith in Jhoras?*

"Sic juramentum facio." *I so swear.*



After a few moments of silence, she continued to the last oath, the one of self. "Juramentum facis quomodo loqueris disciplinam tuam et humilitatem in dedicatione tua ad Joranem Luminus reflectet?" *Do you swear that how you speak will reflect your discipline and humility in your commitment to the light of your faith under Jhoras?*

"Sic juramentum facio." *I so swear.*

Her hands came to his face, thumbs resting on his temples as her fingers curved around the back of his head, tilting it up. "Aperi oculos, fili Jorae, ut testem sim peccatorum tui ipsius." *Open your eyes, son of Jhoras, that I may bear witness to your sins of the self.*

Albrecht opened his eyes, and looked into hers, already knowing the pain of his first confession, one that would bite deep. "I have dreamed of you, longed for your touch, and even now as I confess, revel in your presence again."

Her hands trembled.

Her voice shook for a moment, but then her hands steadied and she was a Daughter of Jhoras again. "Absolutus es, fili Jorae, et poenitentia donata erit super confessionem tuam." *You are forgiven, son of Jhoras, and penance shall be gifted upon your confession.*

Her hands withdrew and she turned away from him to prepare the sanctified wax, the gift of penance that would absolve him of sin. All he could see was her back; no one was allowed to see or touch the sanctified candles once the ritual of confession began, save the Daughter of Jhoras who was present. He often wondered if her hands trembled, like they did when he spoke, a simple representation of how causing him pain hurt her. Was that also a sin? Causing her pain, questioning her strength and resolve?



Perpetua faced him again, and her right hand touched his flesh, tracing lines along his chest, looking for what he never knew. But after a few moments her fingers paused, and spread, carefully applying gentle pressure to his skin, pulling it taut. Then her left hand came and poured from the sanctified vessel; hot crimson wax dropped onto his skin, bringing searing pain as she spoke. "Scito donum poenitentiae absolvo peccata tua ipsius. Invenis iterum humilitatem et disciplinam dedicare fidem tuam sub Joranem Luminus." *Know that with this gift of penance I absolve your sins of self. May you once again find the humility and discipline to commit yourself to your faith in Jhoras' light.*

Albrecht did not cry out, or move. The pain was a part of his duty and would absolve his soul. "Benedictus sim sub Joranem Luminus." *May I be blessed under the light of Jhoras.*

After her hands returned to his face, cradled his head, and he was once again looking up into her eyes, she spoke. "Respic in oculos meos, fili Jorae, ut testem sim peccatorum tuorum vitae in Innatraea." *Look into my eyes, son of Jhoras, that I may bear witness to your sins of life on Innatraea.*

Albrecht paused for a moment, gathering himself for what he had to say next. There was no question that he would tell her, but he needed to muster the courage. It was a strange thing, that a man like him, an anointed knight, needed courage to speak words to a woman; but that's just how it was. "During the Cathyoran campaign, there was a woman of Trefn Cyfiawnder, and her child, a girl..."

There was a deep glimmer of something in Perpetua's eyes; if he didn't know better, he'd swear it was fear.

"They were surrounded by Aedonian soldiers, and I could tell by the men's speech what they planned to do. I... put them down and allowed the woman and her daughter to escape..."



Perpetua's hands shook, her trembling fingers seeming desperate in their presence on his temples, tears dripped down her cheeks. "Oh, Albrecht..."

She fell quiet then, as they looked at one another, and the weight of what he'd said settled between them. She continued to cry silently, as if they were somewhere else, that belonged to just the two of them. Not a knight and an inquisitor, but a man and a woman. Eventually, when it became too heavy, she broke away, turning back to the altar, and her duty.

What would she do? He had admitted to not only aiding their sworn enemies, but slaying their allies. The only way it could have been worse was if they were his anointed brothers and not merely Aedonians. But he couldn't leave that woman and her child to such a terrible fate; no true man of faith could do that.

When she faced him again her eyes were still glistening, but her movements were all ritual; whatever she was feeling had been pushed inward, and to him somehow that seemed even worse. The fingers of her right hand touched his flesh again, seemingly slower than before, tracing the contours of his scars and muscles. When they stopped and gently splayed out again, Albrecht braced himself because this would hurt more than the last. Each time the sanctified vessel poured, the previous wax had already hardened but the pain remained—a punishing journey up the pillar of Jhoras, penance for his sins.

Hot green and brown wax poured onto his bare skin, and the pain was worse. Not only from the physical sting, but also because of her eyes. There was a softness in them, behind a pain of their own, as if she somehow shared in this sin.



"Scito donum poenitentiae absolvo peccata tua vitae in Innatraea. Invenis iterum fortitudinem et compassionem invenire honorem fidei tuae sub Joranem Luminus." *Know that with this gift of penance I absolve your sins of life on Innatraea. May you once again have the courage and compassion to find the honor of your faith in the light of Jhoras.*

Albrecht almost choked on his words. Would this woman forgive everything he did in this life? That forgiveness wasn't hers though, was it? Forgiveness, as with everything, belonged only to Jhoras. "Benedictus sim sub Joranem Luminus." *May I be blessed under the light of Jhoras.*

Perpetua's hands again came to rest gently on his face after setting aside the sanctified vessel, and she met his eyes, solemnity in her gaze. "Respice in oculos meos, fili Jorae, ut testem sim peccatorum tuorum divinae." *Look into my eyes, son of Jhoras, that I may bear witness to your sins of the divine.*

Albrecht dry swallowed and licked his lips, unsure of how to speak what he had to say. Blunt honesty was, however, the only real choice. "I begin to doubt my faith..."

Perpetua's fingers tightened on his face painfully, trembling with anger, and then she slapped him hard. "After everything we have been through? After what I asked of you, and now—now you doubt your faith?"

They both went still, looking into one another's eyes, silent. Her looking down at him, he looking up at her. What could he say? This next part of the ritual was hers, and he knew the pain he caused her. Albrecht had no experience in such things, and could do nothing but stare into her fury, waiting.



Then her eyes softened, and she leaned down toward him, her hands running through his hair as she kissed his forehead. "You have ever been a man of duty and service, Albrecht, even in the face of hardship."

Perpetua stood up again and turned toward the altar, to prepare the sanctified wax, leaving him with his thoughts for the moment.

This time the wax gleamed pure silver and white in the chapel's candlelight, and there was more of it. "Scito donum poenitentiae absolvo peccata tua divinae. Invenis iterum devotionem rectam ad fidem tuam sub Joranem Luminus." *Know that with this gift of penance I absolve your divine sins. May you once again find the righteous devotion to your faith in the light of Jhoras.*

Albrecht gritted his teeth against the pain, doing his best to not make a sound before it was the right time, devotion even in the pain of his absolution. "Benedictus sim sub Joranem Luminus." *May I be blessed under the light of Jhoras.*

Perpetua turned away to prepare for the last step of confession. Mercy. When their eyes met again, he could see everything there. Her feelings, the anger, and the Daughter of Jhoras, forgiveness. She held the sacred oil and a cloth in her hands.

"Scito donum misericordiae do balmum dolori tuo, et absolutionem, sub Joranem Luminus, ut mundum ingredi possis purgatus peccatis tuis et servire iterum." *Know that with this gift of mercy I give balm to your pain, and absolution, in the light of Jhoras, that you may enter the world clean of your sins and serve once again.*

Albrecht didn't speak, merely closed his eyes as Perpetua began applying the sacred oil and cleaning the wax off his skin with the cloth. He was clean. Absolved. An anointed of Jhoras.



After she had gathered her tools and he felt her presence withdraw, Albrecht opened his eyes and looked toward her as she opened the small chapel's door. "Perpetua, I..."

She looked into his eyes for a heartbeat. "I know."

And then she was gone.

Later, after contemplating his confession and absolution, Albrecht got to his feet. His weary body protested, the sanctified wax's sting lingered, and he could still feel the heat of Perpetua's hand on his cheek. All these things were a part of his devotion; however, service always involved pain.

He walked to the small window and opened it, listening to its satisfying creak, feeling the crisp cold air on his body. It was almost time to meet his brothers and perform their Lumresca service. Every year their order gave out food and children's toys to those in need. It was the right thing to do; generosity built humility.

Distant festivities carried to him on the wind. Singing, musical instruments, and the chatter of masses. For most in Aedonia, Lumresca was a time of celebration, not penance. In a way his sacred duty made sure of that. The thought brought a smile to his face in spite of everything.