

Episode 3: Forever Hold Your Peace

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Stained-glass windows aren't made overnight.

To make them, you must first decide what you are making—and how to make it. That alone can take the better part of months, particularly if the glazier and an artist are working together. Broad shapes and silhouettes are taken into consideration, but so too are the smaller shards tucked here and there to dazzle the eye. How many feathers upon the wings of an angel? How many scales upon the head of the serpent? How many fangs, gleaming in the treacherous light? The larger picture, the details—you must have all of them laid out before you. You must understand what you are going to make before you've even begun.

Then you must begin it.

Here, there are also long hours, long weeks, long months. Each feather, each scale, each fang must come from a new piece of glass colored specifically for the purpose. You'll use a blazing-hot iron to cut the pieces apart, hoping as you go that no piece cracks before its time. One by one, piece by piece, you and your underlings whiling your lives away.

Even when you have all your pieces cut—perfectly rounded, sheared to size shard by shard—you are not yet done. Stained glass is too weak to stand alone. You must join the parts, which then cohere into a whole. Break the beautiful work you've made into panels: feathers, scales, fangs, all in their own spaces. Mount these onto iron, and at last, you've created your work.

If you are lucky, it will last a few centuries before someone flings an angel through it.

Sorin's seen many stained-glass windows in his time. He's commissioned a few himself. The process always fascinated him. Like architecture, its frequent companion, it's the work of centuries—something only he and others like him are positioned to appreciate.

It is not the first time he has seen the window before him, but in this hanging-raindrop moment, he has the time to appreciate it. At its apex is Olivia Voldaren, smiling with glee, two tipped goblets of blood acting as the frame for the rest of the window. How long had it taken to complete this monument to Oliva's ego? How many arduous hours were spent shaping every curve of her lips, every jewel, every eyelash?

Where the other families take opportunities like this to highlight their scions, Olivia seizes the lion's share of attention for herself. Oh, there are others sprinkled here and there—feather, scale, and tooth—but she reigns supreme throughout. From her presence at the top to her portrait in the center to her standing now at the base of the window, arm in arm with Edgar Markov.



Edgar, Charmed Groom | Art by: Volkan Baga

They made an aching regal picture—she with her train of sorrowful spirits, he in his wedding finery. He realizes, looking at them, that these are details. His gathered relatives, looking on him with indifference; the wedding guests, as thirsty for drama as they are for blood; his plundered grandfather. One thing has led to the other, one panel into the next: vampires run rampant, he creates the angel, the angel perishes, he is humiliated, Olivia fills the void of power he's left behind.

As she sips from a chalice of blood, as she points to him with a smirk on her lip, her eyes seem to say that it could have been anything. Any sign of weakness would have been enough. Any disaster befalling Innistrad would have opened enough space for her. The woman sought power the way plants sought light.

The larger picture of Olivia's life has always marched toward this.

"Welcome, welcome! Oh, it's such a delight to have so many guests. I simply couldn't have a wedding with the groom's side empty. It'd be such a faux pas."

The way his grandfather dotingly pats her hand makes him want to scream. Edgar Markov hardly had words for his first wife when they were alive. That he would show such kindness to this woman

A chorus of polite laughter from his extended family. They do not look at him, but he feels their derision all the same, like daggers at his throat.

"Now, I'm sure you're all honored to be here, and *dying* to get to the main event. But I hope you'll forgive me; I have a little something else planned first. A little amuse-bouche, if you will, and a present for my dear Edgar. Thralls!"

She snaps her fingers.

At first, he thinks nothing is happening. A small flicker of hope shines somewhere within him that her thralls have finally turned against her.

But she extinguishes this, too, as easily as breathing. Catching his eye, she points upward.

The chandelier? A work of art no less impressive than the stained glass, but what was so special about it? From the look on her face, whatever she had in store was

There is something else lashed to the ceiling of the grand hall.

Something sinks lower, draped in rich red curtains. The shape reminds him of a birdcage, and he wonders if she's made someone stitch her an abomination as a gift. Given her predilection for torturing the faithful, she might have torn the wings from an angel and attached them to a choir singer. *Behold, a songbird.*

But as the birdcage descends, a familiar scent comes to him—angel blood. With it comes a memory: his grandfather, Markov manor, a gathered crowd of his family and their closest confidants. A fear that gripped him by the spine; the weight of expectations like stocks across his shoulders. His grandfather looking on him with pride. A cup in his hands, filled with blood.

Drink and be eternal.

He didn't want to drink. The wretched smell of the stuff stained his palate with copper. And there was the angel, too, chained upside down like

Like a bird.

That day—years ago, centuries—she was still writhing. Her eyes met Sorin's not long after his grandfather's, her plea just as impassioned: *Do not drink. Save me.*

Time has washed away much of his memory, but her whimpering, the smell of her blood, the look on her face as his grandfather forced him to drink—these things stand like mountains against the ceaseless tides.

He knows what he is going to see before the curtains drop to the floor.

He does not avert his eyes.

There is no cage save Sigarda's own wings, bloodied and battered, pressed so tight against her that she cannot move. Red ribbons serve to bind her instead, a mockery of her considerable strength. She does not hang upside down—but she is no more comfortable than her predecessor had been. However powerful the magic, it is difficult to stamp out an angel's spirit; he had learned this firsthand. Sigarda's struggling still.

And when she looks to him from within her feathered prison it is with the same pleading look he remembered. A new face does not dull its blade. His chest aches, his tongue sticks to the roof of his mouth. *Drink and be eternal*, his grandfather had said. But was this what they'd been striving for all these years? To repeat history?

Another thought follows: Olivia can't have brought Sigarda here solely to serve as a gift.



Sigarda's Imprisonment | Art by: Bryan Sola

The blood dripping from the angel's wounds calls to him. He knows it calls to them, too; he knows his grandfather is also a talented blood mage.

Sorin's sorting through the possibilities faster than he can consciously follow, his instincts a sieve for his waking mind. If a ritual like this one was enough to convert his immediate family to vampirism, then this one

Well, it was simple, wasn't it? If you controlled a man's blood, you controlled him. If you controlled an angel's blood, you controlled her. Granted, you'd have to be an elder vampire to handle that much power, but if you drank that blood, made it a part of you, then you might well control angels, too. Assuming you lived.

The *idea* is a simple one; to put it into practice less so. Sigarda being one of the oldest angels did much to help. But they'd need something else, something to bind the blood to its drinkers, something just as old and powerful. Ideally crafted of Moonsilver—he's never found a finer vessel for magical energy. Even Eldrazi weren't immune.

Something like the Moonsilver Key Arlinn and the others were looking for.

The Moonsilver Key Olivia now held in her hands, looking for all the Plane like an offering bowl. The Sungold lock was much the same; together, the two formed a sphere. Sorin watches in horror as his grandfather joins his hands to hers. Together, they hold the key to domination.

Olivia Voldaren with control over all the angels in Innistrad. Eternal night hardly mattered in comparison. Innistrad could endure much—but it could not endure this.

Anger and fear seize him. He fights against his restraints, but the chains only dig in deeper against his flesh. A fell procession of vampires dressed as Avacynian priests approaches. One—his high hat marking him as a Lunarch—takes his place behind the couple.

Must everything here be an insult to him?

Again, the eyes of the crowd are upon him, again they point to him, again they watch to see what he will do.

Drink and be eternal, his grandfather said to him. As if he had any choice in the matter. As if he had wanted to be eternal.

“If you continue to decline our invitations, Sorin, we’re going to stop sending them,” wrote one of his aunts. As if her soirees were the most important thing in the Multiverse.

“Has it ever occurred to you that you’re no fun at all?” This from an uncle years ago—an uncle he sees now flanked by two women while he bleeds a slender young thrall. He laps at the blood like a cat lapping at milk. This is what he thinks of as fun.

There is an *angel* hanging from the ceiling, and that man can only think of passing pleasures.

Torments upon torments.

Olivia hands the false priest a piece of vellum. He has the temerity to read it in a reedy, mocking voice.

“Beloved guests, you have come here today to participate in the most sacred ritual on Innistrad. It is said that herons mate for life. For those such as we, eternal and unchanging, such a promise reaches beyond mortal understanding. The Lady of our most illustrious house, Olivia Voldaren, has pledged her heart to Edgar Markov, and he, his undying affections to her. I understand Sorin Markov has brought his grandfather here to be married?”

“I’ve done *no* such thing!” Sorin protests, struggling again. The guards yank him backward. Worse—the crowd laughs.

“Don’t mind the boy,” says Edgar. “You know how he is at parties.”

“No sense for hospitality,” echoes Olivia.

The priest smirks. “Very well. Now. The two of you can speak your vows to one another, if you’ve prepared them.”

He doesn’t ask who will go first. Olivia speaks the very moment his tongue rests.

“Edgar. Darling Edgar. We met so many centuries ago I’ve long forgotten the occasion—but I remember the moment I realized we should be together like it was yesterday. Sorin left your coffin unguarded, and I thought to myself, what a *fool* to leave a man like that unattended. You’re in my care now, and together, we’ll rule Innistrad. I promise I’ll always consider your opinions for at least a moment before rejecting them, Edgar. I promise to overlook your sartorial missteps. And I promise to grant you the honor of being my husband.”

“Thank you, Most Illustrious Lady Voldaren. Those vows brought tears to my eyes,” says the priest, who has likely not cried in centuries. “Lord Markov, your vows?”

Sorin snarls. The guards restraining him advance in lockstep. Momentum alone carries him closer to the altar. As one, they fling him upon the steps. He lands like a Thraben beggar upon the marble. There are only two chains now: one pulling his shoulders backward out of their sockets and binding together his arms, another coiled about his throat.

He forces himself to his feet. The chain threatens to crush his windpipe. No matter. He’d endure that. He’ll endure anything if it means he can tear Olivia Voldaren’s head from her body.

To see her smiling down on him like this

Thousands of years ago, Edgar Markov made the most important decision of Sorin’s life for him.

Tonight, Sorin repays the favor.

Woodcutter, blacksmith, werewolf, vampire, angel—blood is blood.

He calls to the darkness in the bowl, and it answers him. A blade of red-black slices through the chains as easily as any sword. Momentum sends the bowl tumbling out of their joined hands.

Blood stains his shirt, his skin, his hands—but he stands unyielding before them.

“I object.”

“Sorin,” says Olivia, baring her fangs, “you’re ruining my *special day*.”



Arterial Alchemy | Art by: Caio Monteiro

“So, I just have a question,” says Chandra.

Arlinn smirks. Standing outside the gates, they’ve had little in the way of things to do. A new set of guards replaced the old, but they’re no more talkative. “What’s on your mind?”

“It’s a vampire wedding, right?”

“Right,” says Kaya, sensing danger. “A vampire wedding.”

“Do you think there’s cake in there?”

Adeline half groans, half laughs. Kaya pinches the bridge of her nose. Teferi’s shoulders rise and fall with his quiet chuckles.

Arlinn thinks for a moment. “There has to be, right? For the thralls?”

“I can’t imagine they feed their servants, no,” Kaya says. “Teferi, have you ever been to one of these before?”

“Not a vampire wedding, no, but “

“Something similar?” Adeline asks.

“Something similar,” Teferi says. He rubs at his chin, then shrugs with a smile. “But, that’s the thing about weddings. No matter the traditions, some things stay the same. They’re all about bringing people together.”

“Even with vampires?” asks Chandra.

Teferi nods. “Even vampires.”

Maybe it wouldn’t be so bad when they got in.

Until then, they’d have to keep freezing their toes off.

His preternatural senses alert him to the incoming thrust a split second before it would have taken his head. A golden spear comes into view from behind him. What a dirty trick, to catch him like this. But perhaps a gift in disguise—he is going to need a weapon, after all. He snaps the spearhead off its shaft, then pulls. Before the spearman can recover his balance, Sorin wheels around, driving the sharpened blade into the recess of the man’s armpit. Bone grinds against metal. It doesn’t stop the spearman—but Sorin’s magic does. A single held glance is enough to freeze him in place.

And turn him into a shield.

Guards rarely work alone. This one is no exception. A swordsman is next to try his luck, his weapon heavier than anything a human could manage. A wicked, animal grunt heralds the crunch of impact against his captive’s armor. Sorin raises a brow. What *was* that thing? More cudgel than blade. If Sorin had a say in the matter he’d pick something with better balance.

But he doesn’t have any say in the matter—they took his sword from him when they chained him.

This will have to do.

He hurls the bleeding captive toward the swordsman. In an unnatural instant, he’s behind the swordsman; another sees him snapping the man’s neck. Sorin tears the sword away. Yes, the weight is all wrong, and no wonder—it’s thick as his hand and encrusted with gold.

Disgusting.

Truly disgusting.

Which means it’s the perfect weapon to kill Olivia.

Three more fall in quick succession, crushed beneath the weight of the new weapon. He doesn’t pay them much attention. His captors don’t matter anymore—only the woman in charge.

Five more guards are closing in. He has time for one cut. It isn’t going to be a beautiful one, not with this behemoth. Still, nothing else matters—not what might happen after this, not the Moonsilver Key, not the eternal night, and not the abject horror on his grandfather’s face.

This is far more personal.

Olivia knows it, too; the instant they lock eyes, she grips the Moonsilver Key tighter than ever, as if the power locked within it might save her.

Sorin raises the sword.

Muscle and weight carry it on its dread arc downward, closer and closer to Olivia’s flying form. No matter. He’s stepping into the swing enough to make up the distance. He’s going to end this here and now—

At least, he’d like to.

A flash of light throws him off. The starburst tip of the blade grazes Olivia’s chiffon gown and gloves. Grasping for the now-falling key, Olivia is furious. Even more so when it lands out of her grasp.

“Attacking a bride on her wedding day! I knew you were gauche, but this! We’ll need to construct a whole new *word* for how gauche this is,” she sneers down at him.

His grandfather’s hand lands on his shoulder.

“Sorin, this is more important than you could ever imagine. We need this. The key—my word, what is *that*?”

He doesn’t have to look away to see it: right below Olivia’s feet, the Moonsilver Key glows with an unnatural light.

There, at the altar: a geist of some sort bursting from the key. No—not a geist; something else. He’s seen things like this on other Planes—this is someone’s spirit, separated from their body. A witch, by the shape of her headdress.

“Who invited *you*?” Olivia snaps.

The spirit turns toward her. Brows knit over spectral eyes. “You did.”



Katilda, Dawnhart Martyr | Art by: Miguel Castañón

Ghostly flowers entwine about the witch’s arm. They grow, blossom, and die all in an instant. The spirit studies this with some interest. A simple gesture, and vines join the flowers. In only a few seconds, she’s grown herself a staff—one whose many branches glow with purpose.

She looks toward the angel hanging in the center of the room like a Harvesttide decoration. Disgust and horror mingle on her face. Understanding replaces it, and her burning eyes alight on Olivia Voldaren. “You would stoop so low as this?”

Edgar’s grip tightens on Sorin’s shoulder, but his words only drive a further wedge between them. “Olivia, you must stop her!”

Sorin shoves his grandfather aside. He tells himself that it isn’t really Edgar talking, as if that will make it hurt less somehow. Still, one thing is clear: if Olivia has to stop the spirit, then he has to stop Olivia. With all the speed he can muster, he dashes between her and the key, meeting her head-on charge with a wild slash. Even the bite of the blade on her outstretched arms isn’t enough to stop her—she

keeps coming. He keeps fighting back. Sorin throws his weight toward her, a crude shove, anything to buy the spirit the time it needs.

A bolt of soft, verdant light over his shoulder tells him he's successful.

Olivia's claws rake his cheek, then dig in, holding his face in a bizarre parody of a loving stepmother. The fire burning in her eyes is going to be hard to extinguish. Whatever that spirit's up to, it better be good.

But he hears something then, a sound that fills him with hope even as it dredges up horrible memories of his mortal life.

The holy flutter of an angel's wings.

He doesn't know what's coming, not exactly. But he has an idea. That bolt from earlier must have cleansed the bindings keeping Sigarda in place. Sorin smiles right back in Olivia's face. It's worth the pain of her nails digging in deeper.

"I think your little party's over," he says.

And he watches, delighted, as her eyes leave his to regard something behind him.

Sorin throws her away, turning to face the rising angel.

Making an angel is much like making stained glass: you have to know what she will be before you can begin.

Sorin did not make Sigarda—but he knew her. And in the days before he made Avacyn—the days when he realized this was the solution he'd spent so much time seeking—he studied her. Where Bruna was thoughtful and reserved to a fault, Sigarda never let the perfect become the enemy of the good. She acted when she knew who was on the side of good and who was on the side of evil. Yet she had none of Gisela's bluster, none of her fire-and-brimstone approach to the sinners. The iron framework keeping Sigarda together was an unabashed love of humankind.

He had wanted the same for Avacyn. Or at least a simulacrum of that love, if he could not recreate it himself.

Oh, there were differences. Sigarda felt too deeply, for instance, often offering mercy where ruthlessness might have better served the people of Innistrad. She was too emotional, he thought. That got in the way of her executing her duties.

But looking at her now, framed by the Voldaren's stained glass window, Sorin realizes it's better that he *didn't* make Sigarda.

He never would have imbued her with this much righteous wrath.

Blood streaks her wings, the air around her shimmering with golden energy. Every cut he dealt her in their fight weeps anew. But there are more, too, and he wonders just how it was that Olivia captured her. Whatever happened, they're about to be repaid tenfold. She looks down upon the congregated masses with pure, unbridled disdain. Even the oldest of the vampires quiets at the sight of her—a new symbol for something they once feared.

Sigarda spreads her wings. A shock of white energy forms around her.

"All of you are guilty," speaks the angel.

Sorin takes a breath.

It isn't enough to prepare him for what comes next.

She's bright as the dawn, bright as alabaster, bright as hope—too bright to behold.

Holy light blazes against his eyes.

The stained glass behind her took years to bring to fruition. So, too, the panels that line the walls. How many months, how many years, how many lives went into the chandelier over their heads? It is impossible to know. Even he cannot fathom the collected years of labor represented by Olivia's twisted collection.

All of it—every year, every month, every hour—shatters in an instant.

The light dazzles him, but he can see the cracks as they form, veins of fire against the glass. He can't bring himself to look away even as the light sears him. There is something beautiful in all this: the larger shards, each a mirror, reflecting the eternal between them; the smaller shards, deadly snow; droplets of blood, a blasphemous rain upon the congregation.

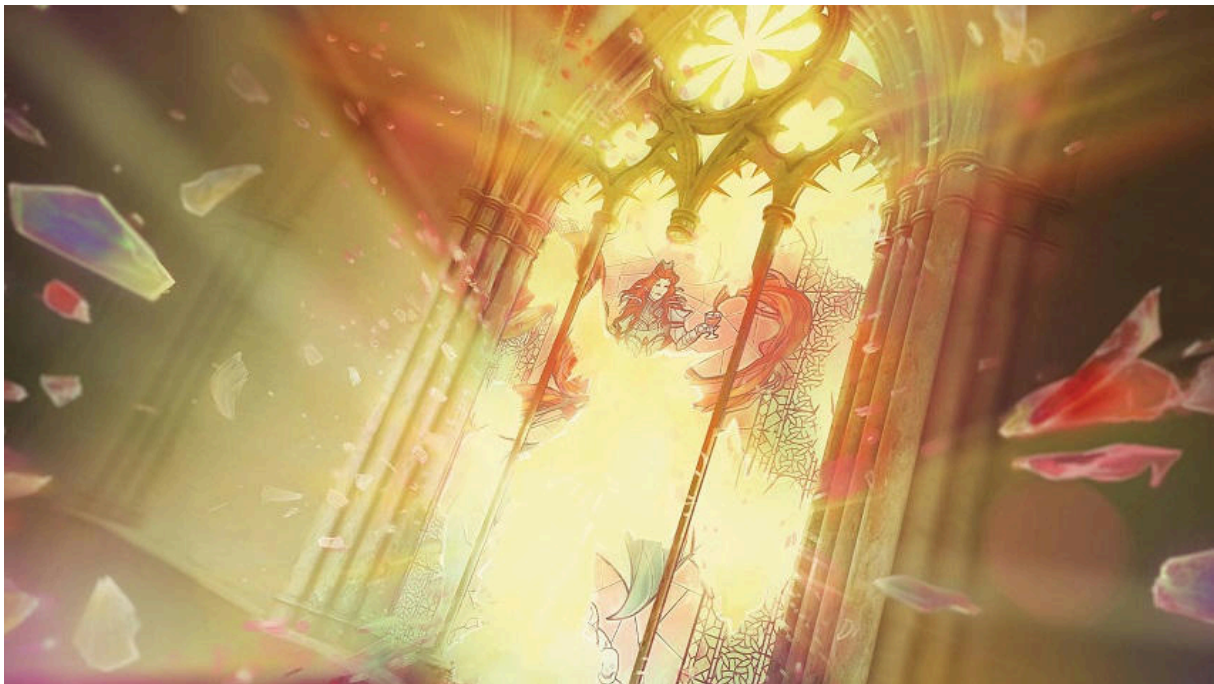
And then the force hits them.

Chaos erupts like a spear through the Voldaren manor.

An explosion of energy throws him off his feet. Before he knows what's happening, he's flung into a fountain of blood—and he is one of the lucky ones. Sangromancy allows him to make a shield from the falling blood to protect him from the incoming shards. Not everyone else has the skill. All around him, there are partygoers like pincushions.

Sorin stands among them.

In that moment, he notices two things: first, that Olivia and his grandfather are, unfortunately, mostly unharmed; second, the glass is not the only thing that's shattered.



Sanctify | Art by: Kasia 'Kafis' Zielinska

Chandra has a thousand questions. Adeline has five hundred answers, about two hundred guesses, and figures the others can make up the rest. Outside of Voldaren Manor, she perches her head on her hand

and watches Chandra talk. No matter how awful the circumstances, no matter how vile the place only a stone's throw away, the light in Chandra's eyes is beautiful.

And it's because she's looking so closely that Adeline sees it: a new light, bright gold, one that gilds Chandra's cheeks.

It looks almost angelic.

"Wait. Wait, what's that?"

Adeline looks over toward the manor. The light's coming from inside the building.

The invitation wards are crumbling.

Chandra grins. "Looks like the party's getting started."