--- selection for actual game ---

When the war between the Aesir and the jotnar ended, we were given to Asgard as hostages. Our father, Farbauti, king of the Jotnar, swore an oath; at least one of his sons should always remain in Asgard, and as long as we did, the peace would hold. Our mother, Laufey, came with us, and never saw her husband again.

They called us *thurs*. *Trolls*. Monsters from Jotunheim, not welcome in Asgard. Only the All-Father’s influence kept his sons from tearing us apart.

I was the eldest. Loki and Helblindi were my brothers. This is my saga.

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~~Our mother never spoke of our father, except to say Loki had his fiery eyes, Helblindi his temper. When I asked her what I had inherited from him, she went quiet and looked away. But I soon learned from the Aesir what my father had given me: his appearance. Unlike Helblindi and Loki, who grew fair of face and light of hair like our mother, I inherited my~~ *~~jotunn~~* ~~father’s dark features and form.~~

~~Loki and Helblindi they called~~ *~~Laufeyson~~*~~. The sons of Laufey. But I was the son of Farbauti. A~~ *~~thur~~*~~.~~

---

We grew up strong and smart in Asgard, under the watchful eyes of the gods. Loki became a troublemaker, and I his constant keeper. Of Helblindi no-one knows but Odin, but I believe he too gained renown in Asgard, and many other realms. Loki’s flyting was sharp enough to skin a boar and no woman could resist his charms. I was growing tired of rescuing him, but when I heard of the sea-god Aegir’s feast I knew Loki would attend uninvited, and cause trouble.

It was there, outside the feast-hall, that I met Baldr, the most beautiful of all the Aesir.

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He bid me join him – something none of the other gods had ever done. I had heard of Baldr, but never seen him, as his mother hid him away at Fensalir. He was the first Aesir not to comment on my appearance. When his eyes rested on mine I felt seen for the first time: he asked questions, and he listened to my answers. When I told him I should get my brother, he stopped me.

“You cannot be your brother’s keeper forever.” Baldr said. “You must show the Aesir not all jotnar are like your brothers.”

---

From that night on, Baldr and I rarely strayed far from one another. When Thor came back from the mountains, his hammer red with jotnar blood, to find golden-haired Syf in bed with Loki, only Baldr’s interference prevented war. Baldr was the one to find Loki a wife to occupy him: ever-loyal Sigyn, insatiable and possessive.

Fensalir, where Baldr’s mother lived, was too far from the other gods. Baldr and I built a hall, Breidablik, the far-shining one, closer to the other gods. There one might go to rest from war and strife. Flyting was forbidden and even Loki mellowed.

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One day Baldr was gone. I traced him to Midgard, a place I had never been. He was sat in a gorge, beside a river so far from Hvergelmir a child could have waded through it. I joined him, and asked what was wrong.

“I had a nightmare. Of a great war with your father’s people. Fire and flood, the death of the Gods, the burning of Asgard. But our roots have grown together, even if from different trees. We both drink now from the same well. To cut one is to cut both. War is not the answer.”

---

~~Convincing Thor to dress up in a wedding gown and cover his beard with a veil was Loki’s crown achievement in this life, of which sagas will be sung for all eternity. His ‘plan’ was meant to fail. If they could not get Freyja as a bride, they could get Odin’s second-favourite son as a hostage, served to them on a platter.~~

~~But Loki had not accounted for Thrym’s vainglory. When Thor marched into the king’s hall, Thrym had dug out Mjölnir and put it on display. He did not know of the strong magic that connected Thor with his hammer.~~

---

The King of the Jotnar was dead, slain by Thor’s hand, after the theft of Mjölnir and Loki’s ill-fated attempts at trickery. From Muspelheim came the angry fire-giant Surtr, guardian of the realm, taking up the crown. As his second he chose Hrym, the Shield-bearer. Blaming Loki for bringing death upon the Earth-Giants, he was banished from Jotunheim.

I became thoughtful and afraid. The new king was war-like, and I wondered if he felt bound by my father’s oath. The Aesir convened often in Things on the plains of Ithavollr, and did not include any of us. War was brewing.

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~~I followed Odin to the Völva’s grave; he brought the witch back to life with dark magic, and asked it to tell our wyrd. The Völva told of the axe-time, the sword-time, when the shields were sundered and the world fell. How brothers shall fight and Yggdrasil itself shall shake as Gjallarhorn is sounded for the last battle. She told of Surtr and Hrym’s attack on the walls of Asgard, of Garm breaking free. And then of how Loki, brother of Byleistr, killer of Baldr, sailed to join the battle with a great host of dead men.~~

---

After he disappeared, I asked Odin for help to find Helblindi. The One-Eyed one looked at me, and then said: “I remember your brother. He threw by his own accord his memory into Mimir’s Well, where it will reside until all the waters in it leak into the Ginnungagap. He did out of shame, once he knew the truth. He would rather be forgotten by history than remembered as the brother of a Nithing.” Helblindi is not his name. That name merely means ‘Hel-blind’; that is why I cannot recount his saga here, because I cannot remember it.

---

I do not know where Loki learned of the mistletoe’s innocence. Frigg told me that she had considered it too young, too soft, to be of any danger, but I had never told Loki that. The only one I had told of that was Helblindi, who was no more. But Loki returned from Hel one day, saying he had found all that could be found of our brother, his visage pale. I know he went that night to the west of Valhalla, where mistletoe grows among the oaks, and there he fashioned his spear.

---

Baldr was with me his last night. He gave me a fine golden ring to rival Brisingamen in beauty. He called it Draupnir. I tried to refuse it, but he pressed it into my hand. “This ring is my gift to you, brother, but you must know giving it takes nothing from me, for I have eight just like it. It is like the gift of kindness: it takes nothing to give, and every time you do it multiplies. Every one who carries Draupnir also carries the possibility to share its bounty with others, at no cost to themselves.”

---

The true test that Loki desired was never to kill Baldr. He did not hate Baldr. He wanted to show the gods’ hypocrisy. By having Baldr’s own brother, blind, gentle Hodr, be the one to wound him, even by accident, he would prove that our brother’s banishment had been unjust. The plan was typical of Loki; brash, thoughtless, righteous. And I did not know of it, because he did not trust me. I wish all to know: my brother did not do what he did out of malice, he did it out of love.

---

~~Thus ends my saga. My nephews are murdered. My brother bound and tortured for eternity. My other brother lost to time. My one love slain, never to be returned. Nanna threw herself onto his funeral pyre, robbing us of her light as well. I have heard Gjallarhorn’s call, sensed the trembling of the ground as jotunheim’s armies prepare. Ragnarök is upon us, and it is all my doing. I have failed my family, I have failed my love, and my legacy will be one of ruin and waste. I have but one recourse left. A sacrifice, for a boon.~~

They called us *thurs*; I did not understand what they meant until I grew older. *Trolls*. Monsters from Jotunheim, not welcome in Asgard. Only the All-Father’s influence kept his sons from tearing us apart; and in so doing, kept the peace.

We grew up strong and smart, all three of us. Me and my brothers, the one called Helblindi and Loki. Of the three, I was the eldest. I was responsible, and I failed. Because of me, the Doom of the Gods is upon us. This is my saga. Would you know yet more?

\*\*\*

Our mother never spoke of our father, except to say Loki had his fiery eyes, Helblindi his temper. When I asked her what I had inherited from him, she went quiet and looked away. But I soon learned from the Aesir what my father had given me: his appearance. Unlike Helblindi and Loki, who grew fair of face and light of hair like our mother, I inherited my *jotunn* father’s dark features and form.

Loki and Helblindi they called *Laufeyson*. The sons of Laufey. But I was the son of Farbauti. A *thur*.

\*\*\*

I met him in the first time in the woods, behind the feast-hall where a great feast was held in the honour of Aegir. I could hear Loki flyting, and I knew he would soon get into trouble. I knew I should collect him, before he did something foolish.

But I was tired; tired of the sneers and the taunts, the calls for Thor to come with his hammer to chase away the giant, and tired of Loki’s endless war to get under the skin of our hosts. That is where he found me; Baldr, the most beautiful of all the Aesir.

\*\*\*

We sat under the fir trees and listened to Loki’s flyting. He did not seem to mind that I did not look like the others. When his eyes rested on mine I felt seen for the first time: he asked questions, and he listened to my answers, however halting they were. When silence fell it was pleasant. We laughed at Loki’s insults, although I feared I had already waited too long.

“You cannot be your brother’s keeper forever.” Baldr said. “You must build your own legacy, like your brothers are building theirs.”

\*\*\*

That night, Loki killed a man at Aegir’s feast. It was merely a servant, but as the blood mixed with spilled mead, the Norns re-wove the threads of my brother’s fate. I felt no remorse then for what I did, or did not do. I had taken Baldr’s words to heart, and Loki’s mistakes must be his own.

I came to the courtyard of Valhalla, where the einherjar battled one another eternal in preparation for Ragnarök. Ignoring the jeers of the attending Gods, I defeated the mightiest champions of Midgard one by one. By day’s end, I was invited to drink in the halls of Odin.

\*\*\*

Loki and I spent most of our days within the endless halls of Valhalla, carousing with the Aesir and the einherjar. Loki was not much of a warrior, but his antics never ceased to entertain, and every night he would have a new song to sing, as if always drunk on Suttungr’s mead. Valkyries would bring us meat, and whenever we entered a hall it would ring with cheers.

But the one I hoped would be there to see the rise of my renown was never present. Night after night the halls of Valhalla lacked the one I longed for.

\*\*\*

I left Loki one night to his seduction of Sif, although I knew that too was a mistake, as her husband Thor was not known for his forgiveness. Instead I went to Fensalir; the hall of Frigg, mother of Baldr. I had with me gifts and proof of my prowess in battle with the einherjar: swords, shields, bracelets, ring mail and helmets. I wished to show Baldr I had taken his words to heart.

Fensalir was nestled deep in the fen, far from the rest of the dwellings of the Aesir. There I found Frigg, weeping. Baldr was gone.

\*\*\*

I found Baldr in Midgard, a place I had never been. He was sat beneath trees that seemed shrunken like dwarves, beside a weakly-flowing river, so far from Hvergelmir a child could have waded through it. When he saw me he greeted me like a long-lost friend, although his eyes were sad. I told him his mother was worried, and he promised he would return soon. He simply needed some time.

“We had a dream. Both of us.” He admitted. “Of a great war with your father’s people. Fire and flood, the death of the Gods, the burning of Valhalla.”

\*\*\*

He did not tell me the role I would play, and I did not yet understand the weight of such a dream. I understood it to mean that even Baldr, beautiful Baldr, was afraid of the *thurs* and was expecting the fragile peace between us would not last. I sat with my all-too-warlike gifts in sullen silence, feeling foolish.

“Our roots have grown together, here in Asgard, even if from different trees.” Baldr said gently. “We both drink now from the same well. To cut one is to cut both. We must make them understand that.”

\*\*\*

From that day on, Baldr and I rarely strayed far from one another. When Thor came back from the mountains, his hammer red with jotnar blood, to find golden-haired Sif in bed with Loki, only Baldr’s interference prevented war. Baldr was the one to find Loki a wife to occupy him: ever-loyal Sigyn, insatiable and possessive.

Baldr and I built a hall closer to the other gods. Breidablik, the far-shining one. A place to go to rest from war and strife, where flyting was forbidden and even Loki would mellow.

\*\*\*

There was one place I was not allowed to follow Baldr, and that was when he visited Midgard. He did so often, and even though I had told him I would let him go alone, I could not help my heart’s ache whenever he was not by my side. I had to know. I sent my brother Helblindi, hoping he would be more discrete than Loki.

Helblindi returned with an account that left me cold even next to the warmth of Bredablik’s fires. By the slow-moving river Helblindi had found Baldr in the arms of a mortal woman; the princess Nanna.

\*\*\*

They were married in a splendid ceremony, and Nanna was formally blessed by Odin himself and ascended her mortal form to take up the mantle of mistress of Bredablik. Nanna was the perfect companion to Baldr: her generosity, warmth, ceaseless sense of wonder and love made it impossible to hate her, but I could not help but resent her nonetheless. I would begin to find reasons and excuses not to spend time in the hall, so I would not have to look at their happiness together.

\*\*\*

It was at this time that Loki told me of his exploits while I had been absent: he had escaped from under the watchful eye of Sigyn and found himself back in Jotunheim. “The women there are something else, brother.” He said. “Let me tell you of my lover, Angrboda. Let me tell you of our menagerie of children. Let me tell you of your niece.”

I realized that Loki was much more attached to our father’s roots, even without our father’s looks. But I hoped then it was merely Loki being Loki.

\*\*\*

When Mjölnir was found stolen, Thor came first to me: he suspected Loki, but knew he had no proof. I feared the worst, especially when I did not find Loki anywhere in Asgard. I followed him to Jotunheim, to Angrboda’s house. There they were together with a whole conspiracy of jotnar, and I knew at once Loki had stolen the hammer: perhaps after entertaining Sif.

“The peace between us will not last, brother. We must strengthen it, through marriage. Mjölnir, in exchange for Freyja’s hand.” He planned to marry her to Thrym, the King of the Jotnar.

\*\*\*

The plan was sound: such a marriage would assure peace, as would the absence of Mjölnir. We kept Loki’s involvement in the theft of Mjölnir hidden, and instead claimed Thrym had stolen and hidden it himself. The Aesir gathered a Thing to discuss the proposition – to no-one’s surprise, Freyja refused.

Perhaps Baldr would have been able to help, had we but asked him. But I did not. I wanted to show him I could do more than fight; that I could help bring about lasting peace between our people.

\*\*\*

Convincing Thor to dress up in a wedding gown and cover his beard with a veil was Loki’s crown achievement in this life, of which sagas will be sung for all eternity. His ‘plan’ was meant to fail. If they could not get Freyja as a bride, they could get Odin’s second-favourite son as a hostage, served to them on a platter.

But Loki had not accounted for Thrym’s vainglory. When Thor marched into the king’s hall, Thrym had dug out Mjölnir and put it on display. He did not know of the strong magic that connected Thor with his hammer.

\*\*\*

After the slaughter, Jotunheim was without a king. But only for a short while. From Muspelheim came the angry fire-giant Surtr, guardian of the realm, taking up the crown of Thrym. As his second he chose Hrym, the Shield-bearer. Blaming Loki for bringing death upon the Earth-Giants, and by extension Angrboda his lover, both were banished from Jotunheim. Angrboda went to Jarnvid, to foster an army of wolves, and Loki brought Hel with him as he slunk back to Asgard in Thor’s tailwind.

They praised Loki, then, as a cunning trickster. But I knew the truth.

\*\*\*

Hel was not long for Asgard: Odin took her from her father, and there was nothing Loki could do. Distraught, Fenrir went in search for his sister, and disappeared as well, after a group of Aesir went out after him. Tyr came back from the journey with one hand less, and no-one would tell us why. Shortly thereafter, Loki also disappeared, Sigyn pregnant with her second child. I know that I and Helblindr looked for him, but I cannot recall that story, as it was not mine to tell. All I know is we did not find him.

\*\*\*

Baldr found me sitting alone above the plains of Ithavollr, overlooking yet another council of the Aesir. It feels like an eternity has passed since I last saw him; and the moment I did all resentment melted away. I questioned why I did not go to him sooner.

He asked me to tell him what was weighing on me, and I did. I told him of the endless councils of Odin, of the change in power in Jotunheim, of the cracks in the peace and what it might mean. And how I worried about Loki and my family.

\*\*\*

Baldr gave me a ring. A fine golden ring to rival Brisingamen in beauty. He called it Draupnir. I tried to refuse it, but he pressed it into my hand. “This ring is my gift to you, brother, but you must know giving it takes nothing from me, for I have eight just like it. It is like the gift of kindness: it takes nothing to give, and every time you do it multiplies. Every one who carries Draupnir also carries the possibility to share its bounty with others, at no cost to themselves.”

\*\*\*

I did not share Draupnir with anyone. I kept it, jealously, on a chain around my neck. I saw Nanna had a ring that looked just like my Draupnir too, and I noticed several of the other Gods did as well, especially those close to Baldr. But like me, none seemed interested in sharing it. I would look at it at night, when it gleamed softly like Baldr himself. The thought of giving it up was unbearable, even though I knew it was but one of many. Sometimes I wished I had the only one.

\*\*\*

Odin came to me and bid me follow. I did so with great trepidation; would he make be disappear, like he had Hel? But he brought me to Midgard, and there, deep in the woods, to a grave-mound. “Here the völva is buried who foretold our wyrd. I wished for you to hear it from her own mouth.” He said, solemnly. Through dark magic only known to the All-father, he then brought the Völva to shuddering life.

“Heith – tell this brother of Loki what will come.” Odin commanded the resurrected witch.

\*\*\*

The Völva told of the axe-time, the sword-time, when the shields were sundered and the world fell. How brothers shall fight and Yggdrasil itself shall shake as Gjallarhorn is sounded for the last battle. I shuddered as each horrifying stanza is uttered by the corpse-rattling Völva. She told of Surtr and Hrym’s attack on the walls of Asgard itself, of Garm being loosened. And then of how Loki, brother of Byleistr, sailed to join the battle with a great host of dead men. I begged Odin to stop.

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“No-one knows of this, and I slew the Völva before she could spread it. I showed you because I know you can be trusted.” Odin sighed. “I know how highly you regard my son, Baldr, and how highly he regards you. Know then this: Loki will kill Baldr, and in doing so, begin the twilight of the Gods. Even now, only Baldr’s restraint keeps Thor going to war, and all it will take is a spark to raise the armies of Jotunheim. You, Byleistr, are the only one who can stop it.”

\*\*\*

I took Sleipnir and bid him find his mother. He took me far below the roots of the world-tree, to Nastrand, where the dead not taken to Valhalla wash up, and then he rode on into the lands of the dead. There I finally found Loki, hidden from the eyes of Hugin and Munin. He was leading a work-crew of jotnar, who were erecting a fortification as mighty as the wall surrounding Asgard – a fortress for Hel. “He banished her here, even though she was yet alive.” Loki explained. “She is now the mistress of the dead.”

\*\*\*

Odin had wished me to fight Loki, but I did not. I gave him instead Draupnir, and asked him to come home. I promised him he would not be harmed, that we would sit again in Breidablik, under the protection of Baldr. That he should give up his ideas of war and revenge. Loki took the ring, and as he did so I suddenly had eight more. Seeing this miracle, Loki agreed. He left Hel in her kingdom, and rode with me on Sleipnir back to Asgard. I thought I had averted prophecy by doing what Baldr would have done.

\*\*\*

In Asgard, the gods accepted Loki back when they saw Draupnir on his hand. A friend of Baldr, however distasteful, was a friend of them all. Sigyn welcomed her wayward husband back, and even Helblindi returned from his wanderings. We drank mead poured by Nanna in Breidablik, fed meats to Fenrir, and peace was with us. Odin himself visited and praise me for my wit. When Baldr came, I gave him back one of my eight rings, and he smiled, and we sat and drank and ate, and told stories.

\*\*\*

In time, the gnawing worry about what Odin had said, about Loki killing Baldr, overcame me. I could see no enmity between the two, but I remembered Baldr’s nightmare, and wondered if it was the same prophecy as the Völva’s. I went in secret to Fensalir and found Frigg, Baldr’s mother, with whom I shared my worries. She told me then in confidence that had already devised a plan to protect him – by asking the *hugr* of all things not to harm her son. Frigg’s *seid* was strong. I felt a great weight lift from my heart as I left Fensalir.

\*\*\*

I came across Helblindi as I returned, and seeing me in such a good mood he asked me what had happened. I broke my confidence when I told him of what Frigg had told me; I do not know why. Helblindi did not believe me. When I rebuked him my brother – his temper flaring – said he would prove it. I followed him as he sought out Baldr, who was in the middle of a Thing. Before I could stop Helblindi, he drew and threw his knife at Baldr. It bounced harmlessly off him.

\*\*\*

For his assault, even if it caused no harm to Baldr, Helblindi was banished from Asgard. The other gods, aware suddenly of Baldr’s invulnerability, took to testing all manner of weaponry on him. Bronze-tipped swords, stone clubs, iron spears – nothing could hurt him. Baldr took their merriment in his stride, although he later lamented to me his mother and him had kept this a secret for this very reason.

For reasons I cannot remember, I did not seek out Helblindi after his banishment. But I do know it was *that* act that was at the root of it all.

\*\*\*

I had not realized how angry Loki was until he came to me one evening with tidings. Helblindi had died, and every memory of his story in Hel erased. He himself had disappeared, not even our niece could find him. “No-one will remember him, or his legacy.” Loki raged. “And the only reason he did what he did was because you goaded him into it. A crime without a victim and an act they now do for sport.”

I realized that Loki was right: except for my own memories of Helblindi, there were no stories of his exploits any longer.

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Helblindi is not his name. That name merely means ‘Hel-blind’. Which is what happened to him. I mourned him, and the loss of his memory, but already the scant few things I could remember about him were fading. Loki took it worse. He spent eternities in Hel, looking for Helblindi and finding nothing. Not even bones. While he was there, he rested in Hel’s hall Eljudnir, bringing to him Angrboda’s wolves to help in the hunt. I could not. If all three of us left Asgard at once, it would break our father’s oath, that assured the peace with Jotunheim.

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Loki had two sons by Sigyn: Narfi and Vàli. Vàli was a kind, patient soul, much like his mother. Narfi had inherited his father’s temperament, and more: Loki had confided in me with pride that Narfi too could turn into a wolf. While Loki was gone, I took to fostering the young godlings. I soon realized Narfi and Vàli were treated much the same as we had been treated: as half-breeds, not true Aesir. The roots of their disdain for anything with jotnar blood went deep. I gave each a Draupnir, and hoped it would be enough.

\*\*\*

I asked Odin for help to find Helblindi and to return his legacy. The One-Eyed one looked at me, and then said: “I remember your brother. He threw by his own accord his memory into Mimir’s Well, where it will reside until all the waters in it leak into the Ginnungagap. He did out of shame, once he knew the truth. He would rather be forgotten by history than remembered as the brother of a Nithing.”

I tried to tell him the prophecy had been averted, but Odin did not heed me.

\*\*\*

I do not know where Loki learned of the mistletoe’s innocence. Frigg told me that she had considered it too young, too soft, to be of any danger, but I had never told Loki that. The only one I had told of that was Helblindi, who was no more. But Loki returned from Hel one day, saying he had found all that could be found of our brother, his visage pale. I know he went that night to the west of Valhalla, where mistletoe grows among the oaks, and there he fashioned his spear.

\*\*\*

Baldr was with me his last night. We sat and watched as the wolves chased one another across the sky, in companionable silence. He spoke of his son, Forseti, and how he was growing up to be a good judge of character. “Perhaps one day we will have an Aesir who will preside over justice. Not the kind of justice Thor metes out, but true justice. I can broker peace, but only because I am liked. I want my son to broker peace because he is wise.”

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Baldr also spoke of the humans in Midgard. They were simple folk, he said, but Nanna had taught him so much about them. “That is why she is my lady: because she gives me hope. Her people give me hope. When the twilight of the Gods come, and all is sunk beneath the waves or burnt away by Sutr’s flame, Midgard will survive where the other realms will not. And they will rise from the ashes, greater and freer than ever.” Baldr smiled, holding my hand. “Ragnarök is not the end.”

\*\*\*

The true test that Loki desired was never to kill Baldr. He did not hate Baldr. He wanted to show the gods’ hypocrisy. By having Baldr’s own brother, blind, gentle Hodr, be the one to wound him, even by accident, he would prove that our brother’s banishment had been unjust. The plan was typical of Loki; brash, thoughtless, righteous. And I did not know of it, because he did not trust me. I wish all to know: my brother did not do what he did out of malice, he did it out of love.

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Thus ends my saga. My nephews are murdered. My brother bound and tortured for eternity. My other brother lost to time. My one love slain, never to be returned. Nanna threw herself onto his funeral pyre, robbing us of her light as well. I have heard Gjallarhorn’s call, sensed the trembling of the ground as jotunheim’s armies prepare. Ragnarök is upon us, and it is all my doing. I have failed my family, I have failed my love, and my legacy will be one of ruin and waste. I have but one recourse left. A sacrifice, for a boon.