

Godwyn the Hateful

An Elden Ring fanfiction written by Hel

Notes:

1) Certain words in this work of fiction are in **bold**. This means that the language of Ancient Dragons, a sort of greco-latin, is being used. Sometimes latin words are used in this case.

2) At one point the term “Flotnar runes” is used. These look like Elder Futhark in the real world, and are considered the universal alphabet used throughout the Erdtree Empire. The term “Flotnar” is Old Norse for “Seafarers”.

3) At one point Stormcaller Church in the Altus Plateau is described, and a statue of Marika is said to be there. As the statue found in the videogame is one of Radagon, it's implied he replaced it at some point.

Chapter 1: A Golden Triumph

(Time: War Against the Ancient Dragons.)

The winding hills of the Altus Plateau extended like an infinite plain, broken up by patches of golden trees here and there. The same color belonged to the earth, the boulders, the clouds. Under the boughs of the Erdtree, the faithful would never be far from gold.

And yet there were those who would challenge such a beautiful world, Godwyn thought. Did they not understand its blessings?

Giant beasts of stony scales, mostly dead, littered the landscape like dead flies. All around them, the knights of the Royal Army shouted commands and moved quickly like ants.

From a distance, Godwyn observed the battlefield. He stood on the defeated body of a gargantuan Ancient Dragon, holding two oversized axes. His armor was golden, and to look at him meant to look at the Erdtree itself: a being of elevated light, the incarnation of the Golden Order. One had to avert their eyes.

His enemy breathed his last, and in the tongue of dragons he muttered: "**A curse upon you, child of light. A curse upon your family! May you come to understand the misery of time unmoving!**"

Godwyn pouted. It was an honorable duel, why stain its memory with such reprehensible last words?

"Rest now, **Gransax**. You fought valiantly." He replied in the tongue of humans, except for the Ancient Dragon's name, that he honored by using the proper pronunciation. Then he quickly cut the string of the creature's life.

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At once the battlefield fell silent. Everybody heard a rumble in the distance, high above the clouds. The remaining Ancient Dragons began to roar in triumph, and the grace-given soldiers fell back, each feeling a cold fear run on their back.

With a booming sound, the clouds split as a giant boulder, no, an Ancient Dragon, fell from the sky. He planted his feet on the ground crushing like raw meat a platoon of Royal Army knights, and destroyed another with an accompanying giant red lightning, held like a spear.

"Ah now." Godwyn thought to himself. "This might be a bit hard."

He searched for the Crucible currents within himself, and began to glow with light. Then suddenly, a beautiful pair of avian wings appeared on his back, and with an incredible jump he at once left the body of Gransax behind, crossed over the walls of Leyndell, and joined the fray on the Altus Plateau.

Watching his arrival, the mightiest boulderstone grinned, and roared once again!

"I have heard of you!" He boomed.

"Likewise, mighty **Fortissax**!" The other replied. He finished his skyward trajectory and hit the ground with an explosion. At the sight of him, the Royal Army felt courage swell within them, and pushed back against the enemy!

Godwyn examined his counterpart. He was beautiful, a creature of imposing strength, with sharp claws and teeth to tear and rend. His double pair of wings, his long tail. And above all, his gold, readily visible on the underside of his frame! What a shame that they had to be on opposing sides! But this was the reality of war.

He readied his axes, and bowed to him. Fortissax in turn bent his neck in a way that Godwyn interpreted as him returning the gesture.

"The time is long past for words. Do not hold anything back." The stone creature bellowed.

"I wouldn't dream of it!"

—

As Godwyn used his golden wings to dodge the boulderstone's attacks, sometimes by a distance too close for comfort, he couldn't shake a strange feeling from his chest. Here and there, a window to attack presented himself, and he punished his enemy with a painful strike of his axes.

They had been going at it for a while, and both retreated at a certain distance to catch their breath. Without saying a word, both factions of the war had thought to give them a wide berth to avoid being caught in their mighty exchange of blows.

Godwyn was sweaty under the heavy golden armor, it was holding him back. At once he planted the axes on the ground, and ripped it apart like a soft linen shirt. The pieces of metal fell to the sides with a heavy "*Thud!*"

Oh yeah. This felt good.

He was now baring his chest, the same as his enemy. Perhaps a foolish act, to expose himself to danger like that, but he had a good feeling about this. He closed his eyes, and felt the Crucible within him flow more freely. In fact, it had never been this strong.

It's true that battle has a way of invigorating the spirit. He thought.

This last bout of attacks would be the last. Both parties knew this. Godwyn readied his axes and let out an enormous roar, not unlike any dragon on the battlefield. Fortissax replied in kind.

The pair became entangled in their duel once more, like two lightnings and thunders coming crashing into each other. They kicked a cloud of dust from the ground, and within the shadows it was impossible to tell them apart. Golden and red flashes of light illuminated it, and both armies looked on, as much as it was possible due to their preoccupations with each other, to see who would emerge victorious.

At once, the cloud was split in half and repelled. A strong wind scoured through the battlefield, and everybody could see that Fortissax lied defeated on the ground.

This was the moment the morale of the Ancient Dragons broke. Like scared birds they elevated themselves in the air, and quickly disappeared.

The Royal Army erupted in cheers! They began to clang their axes and shields together, and shout "Godwyn! Godwyn! Godwyn!"

But the man was facing a stronger enemy yet, that they could not see. As he stood on top of Fortissax, like he did with Gransax before, the feeling in his chest was oppressing him. He threw away his axes with a shout, and kneeled on the stone giant.

He could feel the beautiful creature's frame rise and fall. This was another beast of gold, like him! He could not bear to see him in such a state.

"End me." The boulderstone said, matter-of-factly.

"Shut up."

"Why do you hesitate? It is unbecoming of a warrior." Godwyn felt that Fortissax wanted to say more, but the wounds forced him to keep to short sentences.

"Fortissax." He said. **"Gransax is no more. Your army is defeated. The Erdtree still stands."**

He hadn't done this intentionally, but Godwyn had switched to the language of dragons. It sounded like a song, unlike the harsh sounds of the people from the Badlands.

"This does not have to end in your demise."

"It does. You are the strongest. You stand upon me... the mightiest boulderstone."

"But your gold is so beautiful!" He finally said. **"Your strength, your way of fighting, your lightning. I cannot bear to take your life."**

The Royal Army was now beginning to climb to the plateau where the pair stood. Time was running short.

He took notice of this, and perhaps taking a chance, he proclaimed loudly: "On my name as Godwyn, son of Queen Marika, the Eternal; and the Elden Lord Godfrey! I spare you, and offer you a pact of allyship! I am the Golden Prince of the House of the Erdtree. You would dishonor me to not accept it, and I would have to kill you."

Fortissax inspected the golden eyes of the Golden Child. He was blinded, but he did not look away. He too saw it, something greater than the both of them.

"Hmph. Very well."

Fortissax's body began to glow with red lightning runes, and his body began to diminish, and shift. In the wake of his transformation, the meager frame of a human remained. He was gray of skin, like stone, and wild black hair covered his face. Even in this form, the numerous wounds of his duel were highly visible, and he struggled to maintain composure.

Godwyn extended a hand to help him get up, and Fortissax accepted.

"Glad to see we could resolve this peacefully."

"Shut up. I may yet rend you apart."

"You're welcome to try! I'll take you on every time."

—

The pair walked in triumph on the main street of Leyndell, Godwyn lauded as a hero by the cheering crowd. On the terrace of the highest balcony in the city, he thought

he could spot the figure of his mother, the Queen. Was she smiling? The distance made it impossible to tell.

Fortissax, who had been healed of his injuries as best as the Erdtree incantations allowed, had thought to follow a few steps behind, his head bowed. But Godwyn had resented this idea, and ordered him to walk at his side.

“Your eyes shine golden just as mine do. You’ve seen the incantations take effect. You are no enemy of the Erdtree, and so you are no enemy of mine. In fact I would be honored to call you my **frater**.”

“Don’t get ahead of yourself, human.”

Young grace-given threw celebratory flowers in front of them. Sometimes Godwyn would meet the gaze of a bewildered faithful, as the body of the Ancient Dragon Gransax still laid above them, but nobody dared to challenge the authority and wisdom of the Golden Prince.

Chapter 2: Birth of Hatred

(Time: very little after the tarnishing of Godfrey.)

Godwyn walked with long strides along the streets of the upper capital of Leyndell. Nobody dared to get in the path of the madman, such as his visage was. Nor could anyone ignore what caused it. It was on every citizen's mouth that the Elden Lord Godfrey had completed their war efforts to unify the Empire, and at the same time their reward for this was exile. Indeed the crown now sat on an empty throne, though this detail was not of public knowledge.

Godwyn passed under the shadow of Gransax, briefly finding himself revisiting the distant memories of the War Against the Ancient Dragons. A war fought with honor, he had thought. But something sinister was brewing: after losing a brother, Messmer, and now his father and his army, the creeping doubt that Marika did not give credit to honor after all was finding purchase inside his mind.

He pushed the thought aside, remarking to himself how blasphemous such a thought could be. No, he would simply ask her for an explanation. No more, and no less. And so, grimacing and striding he made his way through the Noble Quarter, the street of the sacred chalices, and into the Erdtree Sanctuary.

He could barely wait for the mechanical lift to reposition itself before him, and considered sprouting a pair of wings and cutting the whole process. But something stopped him. As Leyndell grew in affluence and beauty, he couldn't help but hear the nobility's growing disdain for warriors, and their use of the Crucible. "Disorderly", "chaotic", "dangerous"! Were all words used to describe these people, now that there was no longer a use for them.

Serves us right for trusting Marika, Godwyn secretly thought. Then becoming red for shame, he recited a prayer to the Erdtree asking for absolution. What a fool he was! He thought, to allow his mind to wander to such dark places when about to step into the holiest church of all.

The Sanctuary was deserted, and the air was made thick by the smell of incense. Here his pace grew slower, as he recalled tender moments of his childhood. Being cradled in his mother's gentle embrace, and doted on by the Erdbishops as the "Golden Child". But at this time too his face grew dark, for in his memories he could see, tugging at Marika's sleeve, his lost brother Messmer.

Together they were the Princes of Leyndell, although he did not understand the weight of that title until much later in his life. Each one of them, by the time they were adults, was granted a seat facing the Elden Throne. He remembered Godfrey's

harsh smile when talking about political matters, and how it turned soft when facing them. He was as proud of his children as they were of him. They were impressive warriors, and they prided themselves on their might and honor.

Honor. Godwyn repeated, lost in thought. He caressed one wall, and there a rough oval relief, once depicting a stormhawk, was now flattened and replaced with crude mortar. No particular effort was made to hide the previous effigies from this most holy temple, perhaps to acknowledge to anyone important enough to step into it, that being laid to ruin and erased from history was at once easy and not new to the Erdtree Empire. The Storm Lord too met this same fate after duelling with his father.

“Ah, Godwyn!” An old man called from behind him. “I thought I may see you here. You have caused quite the commotion in the streets. Everyone is talking about Godwyn son of Godfrey, angrily walking like a savage toward the Palace!”

“What of it?” Godwyn said, facing the Archbishop, first among the holy Perfumers of the Capital. By seniority and importance, he was one of the most powerful people in the Lands Between, perhaps rivaling the Golden Prince. He was an old man, bent by age and adorned in sumptuous robes, white and gold all. If the air was thick with incense, the smell seemed to originate from this man. To this, Godwyn turned up his nose.

“Well, we of course cannot allow ourselves to show weakness in these trying times—”

“These trying times?” Exploded Godwyn. “My father has been driven from the land, tarnished and expected to die in ignominy, and you call these trying times? You who stand there in your silly robes and with that annoying smell, what do you know of trying times?”

The Archbishop made a calming gesture with his hands, but it was clear from his shrewd gaze that he had anticipated this, nor he particularly cared for Godwyn’s outrage. He was merely there to stop him from reaching the Palace.

“Now now, child— It is true that this turn of events is lamentable, but as we both know the Greater Will acts in mysterious ways, and we are simply to accept it. If we could simply ask it the whys and hows of life we wouldn’t need Finger Readers now, would we?”

“To the abyss below with your Finger Readers!” Godwyn said, angrily closing the distance between him and the holy man. “This Empire was built by my family with blood and honor, but time and again we are asked to sacrifice it! You know fully well that Messmer—”

There the Archbishop's face grew dark. "You will not speak that name in the Sanctuary, or anywhere else. Promise me, on your honor."

Godwyn's face in turn became that of a demon. "You dare to speak of it?"

"I do, and I know it binds you, as it does me. And if Queen Marika deems it necessary for us to abandon it, I will."

"Then it's no honor at all!" Godwyn replied, taken aback by the brazenness of the old man. "You have no spine, no principles! You are a coward!"

"I am the Archbishop of the Erdtree Sanctuary." The other said, matter-of-factly. "Now—" and his eyes became injected with a cold poison, "be a good child and go back to your chambers. You are experiencing a lot of strong emotions."

Godwyn looked at him, took a deep breath, then suddenly grabbed him with both hands and slammed him against a wall!

"There seems to be a misunderstanding here, priestling." He said, his voice crackling with thunder, his eyes beaming with holy light and yellow lightning. "You do not have the authority to order me around."

"I do not—" The old man croaked, his feet uselessly reaching for the ground.

Wild golden currents flowed under the skin of the Golden Prince, like beasts trying to break the bars of their iron cage, to be let out and make carnage of his prey.

"Answer me this, you useless fool: is Marika there, or is she hiding from me?"

"She is there, but she's busy talking with her counselors. This is a time of great political turmoil, as you and I know."

Godwyn clenched his fists harder, and put his face closer to the small and powerless man in front of him.

"Good." He simply said, lowering the Archbishop. As soon as he touched the ground, he put a hand to his throat and began to wheeze.

"Child— I do not presume to know your intentions or to belittle your capabilities, but hear a word of advice from this old man—"

Godwyn, who had begun to climb toward the Palace, granted him a last look, and heed his words.

“You are strong, but remember that the Erdtree is stronger. None of us are beyond Queen Marika, and you would do well to remember this! If you continue with your reckless behavior, you may find a knife in your back!”

Godwyn's stare became distant, and he took a long time to reply.

“I hope you enjoy the shade provided by the corpse of **Gransax**.” Is all he said.

—

Godwyn walked now more slowly in the highest street of Leyndell, that small and unknown to most trait that connected the Erdtree Sanctuary to the Palace. The handrail was too small for him, big as he was, so he couldn't lean on it to find a moment of peace. He looked on in the distance of his beautiful Capital. The holes in the walls from the last War were being closed, with roots growing inside of them, as well as simple brick and mortar. There was a pleasant breeze in the air, and at once a great sense of discomfort took him. Without thinking, he sprouted his wings and left.

He flew for what felt like hours, leaving the city behind and entering the chilly mist of the Forbidden Lands. There he danced through the mysterious red wisps, being mindful of keeping a certain altitude to avoid a painful impact with the rocks below.

When he reached the Grand Lift of Rold, a giant black gargoyle perked up from its lethargy to stand guard, but upon seeing the grimace of the Golden Prince, he simply bowed and returned to its sitting position.

He could have used the Lift, but his sense of emptiness was leaving space to a dull fury. So he doubled his efforts, made his wings grow bigger, and launched himself upon the steep cliff of the mountains. He felt the cold air challenge him, and he felt alive.

At once he broke through the clouds, and hung there in the sky as a beautiful golden bird. He could no longer see Leyndell, nor Gransax, nor anyone or anything. The Crucible currents within him felt free for the first time in a long while.

He continued his journey to the North, until he found an icy plain with remains of the War Against the Giants. And there they were, lifeless and frozen in time, impaled and left to rot, just as they were since ancient times.

Something awful moved deep inside of him, and he was taken by a great sadness. With a shout, he took one of the trees there and uprooted it, then threw it at a distance. It bounced off a few times, with a few unpleasant sounds of creaking and breaking.

Godwyn shouted time and again, taking this and that part of the landscape and laying it to ruin. From a distance, he could have given the impression of a Badlands savage running wild, only he never knew his native land. He was a scion of the Golden Lineage, blood and all.

—

“Frater.”

He was removed from his rage by a familiar voice. He turned and his heart softened a little, finding the face of the Ancient Dragon Fortissax, in human form.

“What are you doing?”

Godwyn was silent, and only now saw that his hands were bloody and full of wooden splints. He took a deep breath, cleansed himself, and cast an Erdtree incantation to close his wounds. His blood was indeed golden, and at this time this made him feel an emotion he could not name.

“Hello Fortissax.”

“I loathe to repeat myself. What are you doing?”

“How did you find me?”

“Frater—” Fortissax gestured to the long line of destroyed trees and split boulders behind them.

“Of course.” Godwyn said gravely.

“Word has reached me that you attacked and insulted the Archbishop, is this true?”

“Yes.”

“Why would you do such a stupid thing?”

The cold wind blew from the North, bringing with it the smell of ashes.

“He disrespected Messmer. He disrespected my father. He speaks of honor, when he has none!”

“Of course he has none!” Fortissax exclaimed. “He’s the head of the Erdtree church, a step below Marika! One does not reach that position without being one of the most sickly and scheming persons alive.”

“You would say this? One could mistake it for blasphemy, **frater**.”

Fortissax grinned with a beastly smile. Even in human form his teeth had the shape of draconic fangs, and he delighted in this. “I would say this. My lightning is still red, even if I bow to the Erdtree.”

“Ah! You’re one to talk of doing and saying stupid things! What would we do if somebody heard you!” Godwyn said, indignant. But the tears were still streaking on his cheeks, and he didn’t look the part.

“Should we do it?”

“Do what, exactly?” Godwyn exclaimed, surprised. He knew Fortissax to not be interested in him in that way, as his sole preoccupation was strength, and honor. Truly they were a pair in that respect.

“Lay siege to Leyndell, install you as Elden Lord.”

“Have you lost your mind? You could be banished, or killed, for merely suggesting that!”

“But would you like that? You are the strongest warrior in Leyndell, and we can rally the Ancient Dragons together. Even that beast, Maliketh, couldn’t take all of us.”

Godwyn remained silent, holding the thought in his mind. Yes, would he like that?

“Nonsense.” He said, with a tone that meant his decision was final, and the matter would be dropped.

“As you wish.”

Fortissax sat on a stump and gazed vacantly toward the horizon.

“Sit.” He said, motioning for Godwyn to do so at his side. He complied without protest, and together they lost themselves in that silence for a long while, but it was not unpleasant. Godwyn felt the closest to Fortissax, after Messmer was driven from Leyndell. Perhaps because of this he had insisted on being able to call him “brother”. To make up for lost time.

“I understand, you know.” The Ancient Dragon said. “What it means to be a remnant of a prior age, to become a footnote in the annals of history. Not many people remember the splendor of **Farum Azula** and the **Dragonlord Placidusax** anymore.”

“That city floating in the sky?”

“Yes. There was a time it was the envy of the Lands Between. A royal city for **Placidusax** and his consort, the—” but there he stopped himself, not wanting to talk about the previous owner of the Elden Ring. “But now, all that remains is a mausoleum, a tomb slowly crumbling over time.” Is all he said.

“I’m starting to think that’s what happens to everybody.”

“Ah, words a mortal would say no doubt.”

Godwyn gave him a wounded look. Yes, their time together was limited.

“All the same, this life is all we have. Don’t go around wasting it.” Fortissax said, with finality. He then shifted back to his imposing, Ancient Dragon form, and craned his neck to face his brother.

“I’ll see you back home.”

Chapter 3: Once Upon a Night

(Time: between the Age of Godfrey and the Age of Radagon.)

Godwyn moved through the Capital like a ghost. At first the Erdtree faithful had been taken aback by his sudden shift in demeanor, from a boisterous young man to someone without energy and lazy.

These days, he thought, were surely the result of Marika's political prowess, combined with her ability to use and dispose of people. The Empire had been unified, no land under the light of the Erdtree remained unconquered.

And yet, the man thought, this did not feel like victory. He looked at his golden Tree and saw that no sap dripped from it. It was resplendent, but sickly.

Godwyn turned inward, his hazy thoughts focusing on his faith in Marika, in the Erdtree, and the mysteries of the Greater Will. A lot had happened, but at the very least he could know that that benevolent God was smiling on them. Yes, he had no reason to worry. But no matter how he tried to conquer his feelings, he still felt something ugly writhe within him.

He missed Fortissax. The Ancient Dragon had left to spar with some of his own kind in distant lands, a pass-time to remain sane in this period of "inane peace" as he had called it. Godwyn wanted to join, but something within him forbade it. Like a cold hand held at his throat, constricting his airflow and turning him weak.

He found himself walking through the street of sacred chalices. Here, those relics of faith, no longer able to serve their original purpose, had been enshrined under small golden roofs. No sap would ever drip inside them anymore. Likewise, the streets were being swept clean from the fallen leaves of the Erdtree, an occurrence that had caused small riots not long before. The nobility was mindful of not touching these subjects around him, but he could hear them from time to time when they thought they were being discreet. "The Erdtree is aging". They said. "These fallen leaves are an ill omen."

"Lord Godwyn." Said a voice he did not recognize.

"Who goes there?" He replied, turning and finding a Perfumer. Half of her face was hidden by veils, as customary of the clergy, and a pleasant smell of lavender came from her robes.

"Excuse me. I was attending to the chalice below, and I couldn't help but notice your Highness. You seem... worried. Is everything well?"

Is everything well? He thought indignant. I am left alone, and pushed to the side, and made to walk these streets listless and without purpose, and you ask if I'm doing well? I should have you executed!

"I am well, no need to worry." He said, lying. He put on his best smile, an approximation of how he remembered smiling when he didn't feel the world crushing him under its weight. He hoped it would look at least half-convincing.

"Pardon my impudence, but may I ask a question?" She said. Her Perfumer garb made it hard to read her face, and Godwyn wondered if the mouth of their kind wasn't covered to conceal their gossiping. He knew Perfumers to be a meddlesome sort.

"Go on." He simply said, wary for his part.

"Is it true that years ago you attacked the Archbishop of the Erdtree Sanctuary?"

"Oh, that little kerfuffle. It was just a momentary disagreement—"

"But you did, as they say, raise him and force him against a wall? I've seen the dents in the Sanctuary that they say you have made."

Godwyn inspected her face, as much as he could, amused. There was something enticing in her inquisitive nature, and nobody had deigned to talk to him for this long in a long while. And well, he didn't have other events to attend to.

"That may be true. What are your intentions little Perfumer?"

The veiled figure shrunk back in embarrassment. The Prince could tell it was merely theatrics, but he enjoyed his control over her.

"Pardon me. I did not mean to insult—"

"You did not. But you have roused my interest, so now you'll have to take responsibility. Tell me your name."

He closed the distance between them, and gently backed her into a corner. In a strange manner this summoned the memories of doing the same with the Archbishop, also a Perfumer, in his mind.

At this time the woman looked up, and stared at him with the oppressively golden eyes of the severely grace-given. Godwyn for his part held her gaze, his own eyes and

flesh and blood glowing with unparalleled light, second only to Marika. He had nothing to envy to her.

“I loathe to repeat myself. What is your name?”

“I am called Celica, my Lord Godwyn.”

“A good name. Your parents must be proud, such is the grace in your eyes.”

He slammed a hand against a wall, blocking her under him.

“They are. Perfumers as I am. My own father baptized me.”

“A good family. It fills my heart with joy to know that our faith is in good hands.”

Then a silence ran between them, as Godwyn looked at her with a predatory gaze.

“Do you have good hands, Perfumer Celica?”

—

Godwyn looked lazily outside the view of his bedchamber. The sky beyond the Erdtree was dark, but the Capital was mercilessly bombarded by its golden light even now. *The damn thing never stops glowing!* He thought. And then exasperated by his own lack of faith, he turned to the Greater Will and mumbled a few prayers asking for absolution.

At his side was the Perfumer who had interrupted his walk earlier, still half-covered in her holy garments, but also half-naked to indulge in their shared desire. Godwyn thought himself a fool, for he had let pleasure rule him instead of a clear mind.

He motioned to get up, but Celica clung to him in her half-asleep state.

He took her soft hands and gently pushed them aside.

She groaned, and unwillingly let go of his waist, big and strong as it was. He looked outside the opposite window, and as he had left it there was the lifeless body of Gransax, a permanent fixture of the landscape of the Capital.

He sighed, thinking back to the past. Things used to be better, he thought. All of these... politics, were not for him. He merely wanted to exert his strength to his utmost, and fight valiantly against whomever dared to stand against the Erdtree. Once again he felt completely out of place, like a beast forced to wear human clothes.

When out of view from his lover, he sprouted gentle golden wings and flew to a golden roof of upper Leyndell. There he stood, barechested and with his eyes closed, feeling the cold wind against his skin. The Erdtree smelt pleasantly like resin. Yes, he only felt good when alone, he thought.

A shadow danced between the golden boughs, then descended at a dangerous velocity facing him! He knew that shape, so he smiled instead of recoiling. At once it stopped in the air before him, and then folding its manifold wings touched the roof beside him.

“Frater.” The Ancient Dragon said, as quietly as possible given his size.

“Fortissax!” He smiled.

“One always finds you in the strangest corners these days.”

The Ancient Dragon, having resumed his human form, had evidently a number of new scars along his naked chest.

“I assume that the play fighting was enjoyable?”

“It’s no true fight, but it’s all we have in this tedious world your mother made.”

“We could fight to the death if you wanted.” The Golden Child said absent-mindedly.

“Shut up.”

“So...” The mightiest boulderstone said, timidly. “You look... tired as well. Were you fighting your own battles?”

Godwyn smiled. For as big and strong as a golden beast Fortissax was, he still had trouble talking about other people’s desire to love, or have sex.

“Something like that, dear.” Godwyn shot a look at him, teasingly. “Are you jealous?”

“No.” The Ancient Dragon said unconvincingly. “Who are they?”

“Her name is Celica, a Perfumer if she is to be believed.”

“What?” The dragon said, incredulous. “You would still lay with their kind? After being threatened with betrayal?”

“Your worry is misplaced. The only thing that can kill me is the Black Blade, and I don’t think he’s going to go and turn against Marika after all these years, no?”

“Even so, I grow uneasy. My time is limitless, but yours and the Erdtree’s is not.”

“Again with this story?” Godwyn exclaimed. “It’s just... shedding some leaves. Nothing to worry about.”

Fortissax looked at him knowing he was lying. And Godwyn knew that he had been caught. But the pair said nothing. They were at once close, and distant.

“I must go. Good night, **Fortissax**.”

“Take care **frater**.”

Chapter 4: Godwyn the Golden

(Time: Age of Radagon, before the birth of Miquella and Malenia.)

Godwyn was summoned to the square at the foot of the Erdtree. He tried to prepare his heart for the sight of three new princeling thrones being added there, but the sight took him aback. He was the first to arrive, as the Sun was still just above the horizon. It was a pale and almost colorless circle, which light was naught compared to the glorious Erdtree.

Bored and cursing his being an early riser, Godwyn walked over to the new thrones to inspect them. They were made of the same heavy walnut wood as his, also called Erdwood in some circles, and had the same Holy Tree motif on their backrest as the big Elden Throne they were facing. At their top, ornamental small steeples adorned them. The seats were plain and flat. All in all they were objects of incredible craftsmanship, made to resemble the standard set forth by his own throne. It was plain to see that they were newer, because the paint and lacquer on them was flawless. Godwyn delighted himself in seeing a fine work of art, even though he disliked the idea of now sharing the square with three more imported princelings from Liurnia.

This was going to be their first meeting, and he felt uneasy. He had heard of them from the nobility, and he was told they were all red-headed, surely of Fire Giant ancestry, and sorcerers. It was almost laughable to imagine this lot being allowed in this most sacred of places, he thought.

And there they came striding up along the high marble stairs from the Palace. Radagon first among them, baring his chest too, a proud warrior showing his scars. Godwyn could stomach this much, even though he knew him to be an oathbreaker who had abandoned Rennala, the Queen of the Full Moon, to follow Marika's orders. Another dog who thought honor to be a disposable virtue.

Behind him were the accursed trio: a man in ornate golden armor, garish and out of place; a creeping man with his eyes fixed to his feet; and a lean woman dressed in the manner of the Raya Lucaria scholars. His attention was mostly focused on the first, whom he knew to be General Radahn, the new leader of the Royal Army in his stead. A laughable choice, since he had never seen true war.

Radagon sat gravely on the Elden Throne. His crown ill-fitted him, as it was hastily reforged from the one belonging to his father, and the wooden seat made him look small and awkward. Even so Godwyn and his children all bowed to him as was customary, and when he motioned with his hand, they were allowed to sit.

“My demigod children. Godwyn.” He began. “We are now united under the boughs of our Holy Tree.”

The Golden Child’s focus waned, as he found talk of political matters profoundly dull. His thoughts went to perfumer Celica, whom he had not seen in a week.

As the Sun had reached its midday position in the sky, almost completely invisible behind the Erdtree, the meeting was adjourned. Godwyn, who was nodding along though his mind was elsewhere, finally roused from his half-asleep state.

Rykard, who had been appointed as master of the judicial branch, was the first to walk out. Godwyn noticed that his body was covered in robes and a coat, like he was embarrassed about his body. He had tried to strike up friendly conversation with him, but he kept fidgeting with his gaudy rings and wouldn’t look him in the eyes. Giving up, he had simply bid him a good day and let him go.

He does not have the physique of a warrior. He thought.

The next was Lunar Princess Ranni. Godwyn was greatly turned off by her. She had made no secret of disliking the Golden Order, and dressed and behaved in the manner of true Carian royalty. He couldn’t understand why she went out of her way to refuse the blessings of the Erdtree, even though she was recognized as an Empyrean, a possible successor to Marika if anything would happen to her. He couldn’t imagine a greater honor, and he secretly envied her for it.

Should we do it? The words of Fortissax rang back in his ears. *Should we besiege Leyndell and install you as Elden Lord?*

Godwyn thought about it. If he rejected everything that he was, could he take Ranni as his Lunar Consort? But the idea seemed too strange to him, so he dismissed it.

Radagon was patiently sitting on the Throne, reading one ledger or another. He seemed devoted to reading all minutias in it, bent as he was on it, like trying to tease out secrets from the parchment.

“General Radahn!” Godwyn called out.

“Golden Prince.” The Lion called back.

“It’s good to finally get the opportunity to talk to you. Will you honor me with a walk through the Noble Quarter?”

“Of course.”

The pair passed through the Palace, the Erdtree Sanctuary, and then the street of sacred chalices.

“A shame that they no longer serve any real purpose.” Godwyn mused. He thought back to his first meeting with his dear Perfumer.

“Yes.” Radahn said gravely. “I fear that the Erdtree is indeed aging. The fallen leaves have me worried.”

Godwyn inspected the area around them, and only saw the usual clergy attending blessing ceremonies. He said nothing, but nodded.

“Your armor, is that supposed to be Serosh?” He asked. The figure was familiar, and made him feel sympathy.

“I tried to have it made in his likeness, but a lion’s mane is surprisingly hard to get right!” The red-haired man laughed.

“Yes. You should see my own golden armor. I loathe to wear it, but sometimes the Erdbishops are so insistent that I have to accommodate them.”

“Oh! What does it look like?”

“It’s certainly simpler. I don’t like to... show off.” He finished saying, laughing.

“I am proud of my position in Leyndell. Don’t take it as me being arrogant, Lord Godwyn. I think your father is a hero for unifying the Empire, just as my own father is for resolving the wars of Liurnia.”

They passed before a smaller royal house, which used to belong to Messmer. Did Radahn know that when he was ousted, all of his belongings were burned in a big pyre here? The ashes still filled a corner near the building.

Radahn looked at it, not understanding, nor Godwyn would provide an explanation. He thought back to the princeling thrones seen in the morning, and how his brother used to sit on one. Then a great sadness washed over him.

“Let us continue.”

Radahn for his part felt that something had happened, but did not speak.

“So, how are you planning to train the Army, since there are no wars on the horizon?” Godwyn asked, to fill the silence.

“An astute question. Have you ever heard of war games?”

“Can’t say I have. Is that like play fighting?”

“Some such. We divide the participants into two sides, furnish them with wooden weapons, and let them loose at each other. Depending on the scenario, an objective has to be captured to win, or a leader has to be defeated.”

The pair passed under the shade of the giant corpse of Gransax.

“Sounds... fun?” Godwyn said. “I miss true battle.”

“Of course you would! You are a warrior through and through. I would expect nothing less from the son of Lord Godfrey!”

Lord? Godwyn thought. *He no longer holds any such title. What a strange child.*

“May I join you for one of these... war games?”

“Assuredly so! You would be most welcome!”

“That is nice. But tell me about your brother, Rykard, if you will pardon my impudence he scarcely seems well-trained. He lacks the physique of a warrior.”

“That he does. But there are more ways to fight than you probably imagine. For example...”

Radahn pointed to a golden apple on a tree nearby, and making his hand into a fist, it glowed purple and was crushed.

“Sorcery, yes?”

Godwyn pouted. Radahn noticed this and laughed.

“Yes, of course you would dislike it. The Erdtree and the Moon were enemies not long ago, even though now their fates are intertwined.”

The pair looked to the Erdtree, cradling the midday sky with its immense branches. It may as well have forced the movement of the celestial spheres to stop, if it so wished.

“Either way, that man needs to put in some physical effort, or he’s not going to have time to cast his fancy spells in true battle, if that should happen.”

“Yes, I keep telling him the same. But I will be sure to tell him again, on account of the Golden Prince.”

Godwyn smiled. It felt good to be recognized as such after a long while. He had feared for a time that Radagon’s arrival, with his three children, would have overshadowed him, but he did not mind if someone like Radahn took his place.

“Oh, another thing.” The Lion said, as if just remembering. “My Father asked to see you at Stormcaller Church at sundown, be sure not to make him wait. He has a manner of getting silently upset when people don’t show up on time.”

Fuck. Godwyn thought. Did he say that during the meeting? His mind was preoccupied thinking about his beloved Celica.

“Oh... yeah. Sure. Thanks for reminding me...”

“May I call you brother?”

“Let’s not get ahead of ourselves.” Godwyn laughed. “But yes, you may do so. Goodbye brother, I can see that the Royal Army is in good hands.”

Radahn smiled, and nodded proudly.

Chapter 5: To Tame Lightning

(Time: At sundown on the same day as Chapter 4.)

Godwyn retraced his steps through the Altus Plateau. Where he had defeated Fortissax a large number of monumental swords were impaled in the ground. He found the biggest one among them, which said:

“The Routing of the Ancient Dragons
Godwyn the Golden fought to the last,
Earning the friendship of dread Fortissax”

The Flotnar runes glowed with a simple enchantment, such that they were able to remain legible despite the passage of time. The rest of the swords were chipped, scoured as they were by the occasional strong winds moving from Mt. Gelmir to the Mountaintops of the Giants, to the southern territories.

Golden lightning fell from time to time, and he recalled that over the slope of the hill was a beautiful field of Fulgurbloom flowers. He wanted to go see them, but Radagon was waiting for him in the opposite direction. He had tried to arrive precisely at sundown, as instructed by Radahn.

Through the darkening clouds the Sun appeared, and inundated the hill with its dying sunlight. The old church was painted red; its old bricks, big and not well-cut, piled together without any sense of beauty. As he passed through the narrow entrance, a small fit for his frame, he found himself among the weeds of an untamed garden. At the center was a statue of his Mother, and facing it was Radagon.

“King.”

The man turned around to look at Godwyn, only one eye open as if he had been sleeping.

“There you are.”

It was plain to see that the statue of Marika was newer than the rest of Stormcaller Church, and made from a different material too. Not only was the style a far departure from the simplistic, few decorations of the entrance and walls, but the stone itself had golden veins, a telltale sign of it being sourced from the nearby caves of the Altus Plateau. This contrasted greatly with the few roof tiles remaining, that were blue.

Radagon fit well under this statue. He too felt new and to an extent a stranger. Godwyn couldn't help but wonder if this nobody who got picked to be Elden Lord wasn't the true father of Messmer, after all.

He briefly considered asking him, but deemed it wiser to wait to build a certain amount of rapport before potentially burning that bridge. He could never ask his Mother, she was secretive about these matters. But the nobility with their wicked tongues had spared her no amount of ridicule behind closed doors. He had even heard that Radahn knew Messmer, something of which he did not know anything. If his brother had told him, he had probably stopped listening after ascertaining it was some boring political matter.

"I was waiting for you." Radagon said.

But it is sundown! Godwyn silently protested. *What a capricious King.* Or was this a ploy to put him at a disadvantage?

"My apologies, the trek here was longer than I remembered."

"It is a bit far from the Capital, yes. Regardless..." Radagon walked up to him. His chest was that of a proud warrior, filled with scars held as trophies of battle. "I require your assistance with a certain matter."

"I'm all ears my Lord."

"Let's walk."

The pair exited the Church, and looked on as golden lightning struck in the distance.

"That." He said, pointing a finger toward the field of Fulgurblooms. "You have made that yours. Show me."

"At once."

Godwyn walked at a safe distance, then started breathing deeply, and calmly. He found the Crucible currents sleeping within him, and roused them. As he did so, they began to crackle under his skin. It had been a long while since he let them run free, and a smile appeared on his face. It felt good.

"You may want to shield your eyes, my Lord!"

All of a sudden, he flexed his muscles to the utmost, and a giant strike fell onto him! It continued for seconds, being wrestled unnaturally from the sky and into the hands

of the Golden Prince. Even as it gave up and disappeared, a part of it remained all around the naked chest of the beast known as Godwyn.

“Like that.”

“Marvelous!” Radagon exclaimed, for the first time tinging his voice with some amount of emotion. His eyes were staring at the glow without pain, a mark of the truly grace-given, and they were filled with excitement.

“Teach me! How do I do that?” He said, like a spoiled child. Godwyn could scarcely believe he was talking to the second Elden Lord. But he didn’t dislike that.

“There’s an art to it. If you’re just starting out, I would recommend dedicating your thoughts to the priestess, **Lansseax**.”

“Like idol worship?” The red-haired man said. His voice cracked; his excitement was bent, but not broken.

“Yes, the Knights worship the Ancient Dragons and obtain their power. It’s called a Cult for a reason you see?”

“Oh...” The man said, his excitement rapidly waning. “But I suppose they are made of living gold, so I can see how they are ultimately a conduit to the Greater Will...”

“Yes. I’m glad you can see it!” Godwyn exclaimed, then with some effort freed himself of the lingering energy in his body by shaping it into a spear, and throwing it a long way onto the opposite side of the hill, where it exploded with a flash of light and thunder!

“Incredible. There are so many mysteries left unsolved in our faith...”

“It’s not particularly mysterious. Red lightning is the raw power of an Ancient Dragon, a current of the primordial Crucible. If what you’re after is true golden lightning, like mine, you have to see them as siblings under the Golden Order.”

Radagon took his chin and began to mumble something, deep in thought.

“But surely there’s a way to explain this.”

“Mmh?”

“We are past the age of dogma now, Godwyn. Let us find a more agreeable explanation that doesn’t require idol worship.”

What? Godwyn thought. *But I explained it to you plainly! It's an incantation, it requires faith by its own nature!*

"I cannot very well bow down to Lansseax and ask her to give me her powers, can I? I'm Elden Lord now. I have to act like it."

Godwyn was taken aback by this. He knew the Ancient Dragons to be his siblings, especially Fortissax.

"I much prefer to see them as conduits for the Greater Will, but even then, it's bothersome to imagine them as Lords of the Crucible. We are past that now."

Godwyn fell silent. The hatred inside of him reared its ugly head again, and he felt his control over it begin to slip.

"There is also growing concern that they were able to breach our defenses, so maintaining them as allies does not come without its own set of preoccupations."

"They are our allies." He simply said.

"Are they?" Radagon replied immediately. "What do your eyes see when you watch them, Godwyn? I see dangerous beasts, their lightning still red."

Should we do it? Godwyn heard his frater say in his thoughts again. If he wanted to attack the Elden Lord then and there it would have been the two of them, and he did not look particularly strong. As much as he styled himself a victor, he only won Liurnia with a political marriage. If there was a trophy of his victory, it was a wedding ring, and he had discarded it for Marika.

Oathbreaker. He thought.

"They are our allies. I can say this on my honor, which despite everything I still have."

The second Elden Lord looked at him with a distant gaze. Then his eyes burned with the same intensity as Marika, and Godwyn had to look away to avoid being blinded.

"Go back to Leyndell, child." Radagon said, with a voice that did not belong to him.

"Yes. Yes, I should. Goodbye Mother."

Godwyn was stopped in his tracks at about half of the trip back, as he heard a strange sound from the hill. He turned and saw the red-headed champion, holding a

perfectly straight line of pure light. A parody of his lightning, but completely under his control.

Chapter 6: Godwyn the Hateful

(Time: Age of Radagon, after the birth of Miquella and Malenia.)

He slumped through the streets of the Capital. His face was pale, and deep eye bags adorned his once pretty visage. Godwyn the Human found himself on the stairs that led to the lift that led to the Erdtree Sanctuary. He looked to his left, where a statue of Godfrey once stood triumphant, and in its stead found the likelihood of King Consort Radagon, the second Elden Lord, in the pose of the Golden Order Totality. That wretched form employed by the Fundamentalists, that rejected the Crucible in favor of academic study. Godwyn found it laughable, but no air left his sore throat.

What he had seen years before on the Altus Plateau had made his heart crack. Radagon was Marika, meaning Miquella and Malenia were the product of unnatural reproduction. Offsprings of undiluted divine blood. Was this the reason for their Empyrean status? Was Messmer one too? They were, the three of them, cursed.

The Two Fingers had to know, and they kept quiet.

The lift brought him to the Sanctuary. There the familiar smell of incense welcomed him, and for a second he lowered his guard. One lady left a group of High Perfumers and came to join him.

“Godwyn, dear. One could mistake you for a ghost.”

“Am I not one, Celica? Am I not dead and buried already?”

The woman scoffed, and took out a physick from her robes.

“Here, drink this, my dearest ghost.”

Godwyn examined the elongated bottle in his hand. It was semi-translucent, and a dull golden fluid swirled inside. The pattern of the Erdtree was impressed upon it, such that the cork were its boughs. The image made him nauseous, as he had come to hate it. Nevertheless he drank the entire elixir without breathing, and when he was done a bit of color returned to his cheeks.

He felt the blessing of the Holy Tree surge within him. This much was pleasant, as much as it reminded him of Radagon, who secretly was Marika. A secret that he felt only he knew in the entire Capital.

He tried to calm down, and looked at Celica’s eyes. Her grace was shining stronger than ever.

“Do you mean to tell me something?” He said.

“Yes, my Lord. Two things in fact, both of extreme importance.” She began to smile.

“Go on. Don't make your Lord wait!” He said, chuckling.

“Firstly, I have been asked to become a Finger Maiden. If I accept, which I intend to do, I will be trained in the language of light, and I will become the voice of the Two Fingers.”

“Impressive! There's my High Perfumer.” Godwyn said, secretly feeling a number of conflicting emotions, but deeming it safer to not voice them at this time and place. “And what is the second news?”

“This one is even more important.” Celica said gravely.

“More important than becoming a Finger Maiden? Tell me, what is it?” He said, laughing.

“I have stopped menstruating, my Lord.”

The words echoed hollow in Godwyn's head. *What?*

“How many weeks?”

“Three now, my Lord.”

What?

“Well.”

Godwyn stood there like an idiot, looking at her.

“It's yours, **aurum meo**.” She said, shifting to draconic for his sake. She had learned that he used that language when he was overwhelmed.

“But—”

“**It is. The main branch of the Golden Lineage lives.**”

Godwyn cracked, tears welling in his eyes at the thought. He wanted to tell Godfrey, but immediately that thought was replaced by the image of his father being tarnished and exiled.

He looked her in the eyes. Then he lowered the veil over Celica's mouth, took her head with both hands, and planted a passionate kiss on her lips!

"My Lord Godwyn! Not in front of my superiors, please!"

Godwyn shot a glare at the rest, who readily moved elsewhere to discuss the mysteries of the Greater Will. It was plain that they were listening in to their conversation, and before sundown the whole Capital would know. Godwyn the Golden, the spurned Crucible child, would sire an heir.

"As long as Mother— and Radagon stay in the Palace I hold the highest authority here."

A wall of the Sanctuary not too far from them remained dented. Celica followed Godwyn's gaze, who had set upon it, and chuckled.

"But I must go. A meeting of the Demigods has been called. I will see you back home, **aurum meo.**"

"Of course." She said. "Goodbye Godwyn."

—

He sat down on his princeling throne. It was worn down, bent by the passing of centuries. The Erdwood had changed color, becoming noticeably lighter than the others to its right. There were now six of them in total, not counting the Elden Throne they were facing.

Two more had been added long ago, as Radagon had announced that Queen Marika was pregnant with twins. It had been no time at all until they grew up, and were allowed to participate in the workings of the Empire. Their thrones were commissioned ahead of time, so Miquella's one was made to the wrong size, expecting him to grow as tall as Godwyn.

The Golden Prince slumped in his, not bothering to keep up appearances.

"Lord Brother, please." Miquella the Kind said with a pristine voice. Godwyn was almost sure that Radagon, that is to say Marika, had wanted to put them close to insult him, considering how much they looked alike. As if to say: "Here, I can make another of you, but loyal. Not stained by the Crucible."

And they did look alike. Their long locks of golden hair, their princeling crowns, their oppressive grace that blinded almost everyone else.

Only, of course, that Miquella was cursed. It had become apparent that he wasn't capable of aging. Which meant of course he wasn't capable of having offspring, as puberty remained a far-off dream to him. He sat awkwardly on a throne he would never be able to properly fit, nor pass down.

Barely an issue. Godwyn thought. *Six thrones is more than enough. How more selfish could Marika get?*

"Lord Brother..." Miquella repeated, as Godwyn was just staring at him, his gaze moving beyond him and into landscapes he could not possibly know. The Mountaintops of the War Against the Fire Giants, when everything was in opposition to the Erdtree. The betrayal of the Hornsent and their cleansing, removed from the public records. The stalemate of the Liurnian Wars and Radagon— Marika's marriage to Rennala.

"Get off my back, **puer**." Godwyn whispered, and sat more properly, as befit of the Golden Prince of the House of the Erdtree.

"Miquella." Radagon called out, perhaps to quell their brotherly conflict. "Tell me about the scrolls we had imported from the Land of Reeds."

"Yes, Father." The child smiled. "They have interesting ideas about medicine. They think something called a 'life force' flows within the body, and that it can be altered with the use of accurately positioned needles. I intend to continue this line of study."

Yeah, no shit. Godwyn thought, letting a single strand of Crucible current silently flow through his chest, to his right arm, and back. However the use of needles was a novelty he had never considered, he had to secretly concede.

Miquella and Radagon continued to discuss the logistics involved, such as increased manpower and the establishment of a new wing in the library of the Palace. Malenia stood silent, statuesque and still. The Rot had taken her eyes, and she sparsely spoke if not prompted by his brother. Her long red hair fell in front of her face, giving her an air of mystery.

Unlike Radahn, who wore his characteristic Serosh armor, and Rykard, who did not have the physique of a warrior, Malenia reminded him the most of his lost brother Messmer.

Again he thought about the secret bonds of blood that bound everyone present, and those who were no longer there.

He looked at each throne briefly, and caught Lunar Princess Ranni already staring in his direction. She quickly looked away.

Malenia nodded along for the entire conversation, only letting out a small sigh from time to time. It was no secret that Miquella and Radagon had emptied the library of the Palace looking for a way to rid her of the Scarlet Rot. His Mother had done the same for Messmer's Abyssal Serpent ages ago, and at that time her solution had been to send his son away after failing to heal him.

Godwyn was young, but remembered thinking that it was a strange display of powerlessness from the God of the Erdtree. It was only with the centuries that followed that these events started to make more sense in his mind. There was a rift between what Marika said, and what came to pass.

She lauded honorable warriors, only to banish them.

She repelled Death, only to send countless toward it.

She was the Queen Eternal, except the Erdtree was aging.

Godwyn gave a long look to the Elden Lord Radagon, who turned to him and said nothing. His face was neutral, but it felt like a mask. Only on the Altus Plateau, and only briefly, had he been able to get a glimpse of what was under it. He doubted anyone else could.

The meeting was then adjourned, and he made to walk back to the Palace with Radahn, talking about a possible joint visit to Redmane Castle to raise the morale of the troops in that distant land.

When they came to the Lion's chamber they parted. It was as gaudy as expected inside, with countless historical artifacts belonging to the Age of Godfrey decorating its walls. Godwyn chuckled but secretly enjoyed it. It made him feel old, but appreciated.

"Take care brother." The Golden Prince said.

"Goodbye Godwyn."

—

"Grandma?"

He lowered his large frame to enter the small abode of the woman he would call as such. Inside, in the twilight, the husk of a woman rested against a wall, her small chest raising and lowering with some effort.

“Oh, my sweet lordling! A thousand blessings upon the Greater Will, why do you show at my doorstep?”

Godwyn shrunk, immediately reverting to a child in front of his grandmother.

“I beg your pardon, is this a good time to visit?”

The woman's name was Hiedi, and she had been a Finger Maiden and his wetnurse ages before. She threw herself upon him.

“It is now!” She said, removing a half-knit pouch from the table. “What brings you to my house dear?”

“I wanted to see you.”

Godwyn slumped into the empty bench beside the table. This small hole of a dwelling felt cramped, but he did not dislike it. If anything, the smell of incense was dear to him.

He looked at her, and making himself small, he hugged her and said nothing.

“My Lord! What has come over you?”

“I’m going to be a father, Hiedi.”

The old woman made a strange noise, as if breathing deeply through her hoarse throat. Her eyes had long receded into lightless cavities, but even then a tear formed on their edges.

“My Lordling, a father!” She cried.

“I’m going to be a father!” He repeated, as if to convince himself.

The pair hugged and cried for a long time.

“Is it High Perfumer Celica?” She asked, with the tone of a courtesan who liked to gossip.

He chuckled, imagining the onslaught of questions he would soon have to answer in the Palace. “That's Finger Maiden Celica now. And I plan to make her my wife.”

“Oh marvelous! A thousand blessings upon the Greater Will! It seems it has not forsaken us yet. And a thousand blessings upon you, my dear!”

She spoke in an old-fashioned manner, but he did not mind. It was the proper language from the Age of Godfrey, unlike the base dialect that Miquella and Malenia spoke. He could adjust to the latter, but it felt strange and unpleasant. Only with this one the sounds came out clean and well-defined.

“Have you thought of a name?”

“Yes.” He said. “I will ask the woman of the house for permission, but I was thinking ‘Godward’. If the theories of the Perfumers are correct he shall be a boy. My seed is of course one of the strongest in the Lands Between, and I do not expect it to lose to Celica’s feminine blood.”

“Of course.”

The pair drank from small cups of herbal tea that had been prepared. They were ashen black, decorated with painted golden leaves. It was a design from the Lower Capital, before the Empire grew wealthy.

“And if it were to be a girl? If that should come to pass.”

“I’ve never thought about it. ‘Godward’ has been in the back of my mind for years, but I’ve never thought about the possibility of siring a female.”

The old maiden husk chuckled. “You better be prepared child, the Greater Will has a habit of surprising us.”

“It does.” Godwyn said, thinking back to the Two Fingers. “But the hour grows late, and I must not let my beloved wait. Thanks for the tea grandma.”

“Thanks for visiting.” The old woman smiled. “Goodbye Godwyn.”

—

He roamed the streets of the Lower Capital alone. He was facing an enemy that none of his friends and family could see. He pictured in front of him this “Godward” or other, much in the image of Miquella, and pondered whether he should be taught in the way of Marika, or be taught to fear her. To distrust her. He did not wish to sire a pawn for her to use. Moreso, the Crucible would be strong within him.

He looked gravely upon the corpse of Gransax. Ages had passed, yet it remained unmoving. The walls of the Capital had been fully repaired, so it looked like he was simply resting, perched upon the street of sacred chalices, facing the Erdtree.

“May you come to understand the misery of time unmoving!” He had said.

Godwyn thought he saw the shadow of a Black Knife out of the corner of his eye. That was a common sight in the Lower Capital, so he put it out of his mind. He made to walk back to the Palace.

Epilogue: My Brother

(Time: Miquella's pilgrimage to the Land of Shadow, long after the Night of Black Knives.)

The shadow of the Erdtree, the Scadutree, challenged the skies. Bent and burnt, it still stood as a pillar that could be seen from everywhere in the Land of Shadow. It bled gold, that fell uselessly in the northern sea. No chalice would ever cradle its blessings.

There were long and windy plains, filled to the brim with tombstones that had begun to become spirits. Settlements of a culture foreign to the Empire could be seen here and there. Burnt and covered with large veils all.

Passing through Castle Ensis, and the domain of Lord Rellana, was the highroad that led to the Shadow Keep. It was an impressive, monolithic slab of stone that oppressed everyone who would look upon it. Layers upon layers of finely crafted black bricks, accurately put together to create an embodiment of the concept of fear.

At its top, in its highest chamber, sat Messmer the Impaler. He was perched on his princeling throne, a replica of the one he lost in Leyndell. An Erdtree engraving decorated its backrest, and behind it a statue of Queen Marika towered over it. Here at its highest peak, what stood the highest wasn't him, but his Mother.

At the center of the room was a child, glowing with pure golden light against the darkness that surrounded him. Messmer's snakes recoiled at the sight, but tried to maintain their gaze on him.

The pair spoke of the history that had come to pass unto the Lands Between since he was exiled. The War Against the Ancient Dragons, the tarnishing of Godfrey, and Queen Marika's second marriage. And beyond that: the disappearance of Lunar Princess Ranni, the uprooting of Godwyn and his Golden Lineage, and the shattering of the Elden Ring. The fracturing of the Empire. The Two Fingers turning against the House of the Erdtree. The return of the Tarnished.

They talked for what felt like ages. At some point, Messmer grimaced and took a great spear from beside his throne. But Miquella stared at him with glowing, golden eyes, and he let it go. The child then smiled, said something, and left.

—

Days later the darkness of Messmer's chamber was illuminated again by his eldest Fire Knight, a scholar called Wego. He wore a mask in the image of two warped faces put together, and spoke slowly and deliberately.

"It is true, my Lord and master. Reports of scouts sent to the catacombs have confirmed the presence of the Death Knights, as Miquella said."

"Trouble me not with these minions, Wego. Is he there?"

The old man looked at Messmer for a long time, then nodded.

"As much as a soulless body can be, he is."

"Then I must go."

For the first time in ages, the serpentine, fallen Prince of Leyndell left the Shadow Keep. He took a small group of Fire Knights with him and made to the nearest site of a confirmed spotting. They rode horses through the highway, Castle Ensis, and arrived at the Fog Rift Catacombs.

Lord Rellana had proposed to join the group, but was turned down on account of Messmer's desire to travel with a small troupe. Her silver steel armor was sure to attract undue attention.

Messmer's face grew darker with each step of their funerary march. As they arrived at the chamber once dedicated to Erdtree Burial, he motioned for his comrades to halt.

He walked alone into the giant, empty room. A skeleton knight, adorned in gray and golden armor, turned to face him.

"One of Those Who Live in Death, I take it..." He said. "I trust you recognize who I am."

He kept walking closer to the thing in the wall. The skeleton bowed, and let him pass.

He looked at it strangely, trying to find the likelihood of who he lost, so long, long ago.

"Hello brother."