

EVERSOR

Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall
bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and
whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be
loosed in heaven.

Matthew 18:18

Death and life are in the power of the
tongue

Prov. 18:21

The monk lying in the cot is old. No-one really knows how old he is. His skin has suffered a disquieting migration, being thin and stretched white across his bones where it is not gathered in thick wrinkles and folds. Beneath his face his skull seems almost visible, the large orbs of his eyes prominent against his sharp cheekbones, the outline of his jaw covered in the white, scraggly remnants of a beard. His breath wheezes from his lungs – laboured, wet and painful.

“Brother Reynir! Brother Reynir!” Softly, yet insistently, one of the Brothers assembled around the cot tries to rouse the old man, a cup of water in his hand. “Come, Brother, you must drink.”

The old man takes in a shuddering breath, inhaling the clean, sweet scent of the water – and in the dimness of his mind, the old man remembers...



“Reynir!”

“Reynir!”

The voice has been repeating – firmly and consistently – for some time now. I can feel it as much as I hear it. Somewhere deep inside my skull, like a pounding headache, it’s become mixed up in the pulse of my blood and with each repetition a dull light flashes in front of my eyes.

“REYNIR!”

Loudly now. Urgently. Insistently.

“REYNIR! You must come back. You must drink!”

Drink...yes...I am sticky, dry and aching – I am parched. My nostrils feel coated in sand, my throat tightly constricted like an

archer's bow, my tongue is thick, my lips sting with a thousand cuts.

I don't feel present. I'm unsure where I am. Everything is harsh, raw, confusing – like I am waking from a long, deep, drunken sleep only to find that I am still drunk.

“Reynir... Please!”

The light is painfully bright as I un-gum my eyes and look dully at the face in front of me: bearded; hard lines etched around the eyes; a scar running across one cheek and terminating at a badly broken nose. The face is familiar, but I cannot think of its name. It looks surprised and relieved.

Blinking, swaying back and forth, I try to focus my vision. A cup appears in front of me – water has never smelled so sweet. Hands trembling, I reach for it. I take it and manage to spill only half of it down my front. It's like trying to flex stone every time I swallow, so I am forced to drink in small sips. Slowly the balm of moisture begins to loosen my throat.

“Ul...ric,” I recollect.

The Englishman nods and when I finish the water, his giant hand takes back the empty cup and fills it again.

My brow furrows as I notice the debris of wood and pottery in which I kneel, and which appears to be strewn across the floor from wall to wall.

“You had me worried, brother”, Ulric says, quietly. “What do you remember? *Do* you remember, Reynir?”

I look down again at the splinters and chips of wood around me, and at my torn and bloodied knuckles.

It's then that I notice *them*, and my chest tightens. They're silent, but I can feel the judgement in their eyes, and it finds me wanting.

Suddenly I find myself panting short, harsh breaths like the air is too cold for comfort. For a moment I feel as though I will be overwhelmed again, and blackness impinges on my vision. Ulric reaches out and steadies me. I grab hold of his arm – like an oak wrapped in chainmail – and with his assistance, haul myself upright. Immediately, the pounding in my head doubles in intensity, and the accompanying burning sensation that abruptly courses into my lower legs and feet makes me wish I had not moved at all. I cry out and buckle, relying entirely on Ulric to stay upright, as the fire spreads up to my hips.

I look up at my friend. Meeting his eyes, I nod, and Ulric grimaces.

The pain makes me hiss through gritted teeth.

“Come, sit.”

Ulric practically has to lift me to a low wooden bench – the only piece of intact furniture that I can see – and I collapse heavily. The pain in my lower body is extreme. My hand traces the single swirl in the centre of the bench. I remember carving it, sometime in a past that seems so distant as to have belonged to another man, and I focus on following its circular path with my finger.

For a long time, I sit in silence, rubbing my legs as the pain slowly subsides. Nobody says anything, and Ulric busies himself in the small room, packing two saddlebags. The soft clink of his scabbard against his mail skirt is the only noise. Occasionally, he pauses in his work to refill my water cup.

The pounding in my head continues unabated and the skin on my face feels taut, as if it is stretched thin under pressure. Neither of the other two has taken their eyes off me at all and under their unrelenting gaze I feel panic rising. The small muscles below my right eye start twitching incessantly, and my ribcage does not feel strong enough to contain my breathing. Ulric glances over at me. I squeeze my eyes shut, forcing myself to inhale and exhale slowly until I feel calm return. When I open them again, Ulric has his back turned to us.

Ignoring the two females, I focus my attention on my comrade. "I'm not going with you, Ulric", I eventually say.

He nods and turns to face me.

"What will you do?" he says simply.

I look him straight in the eye.

"Ah..." says he. "You really do remember."

"I made a promise, Ulric. I will keep it."

In my peripheral vision there is, I think, the barest of affirmatory nods from the woman. The girl says nothing, instead just continues to stare at me.

Ulric looks at me and shakes his head. "It cannot be done".

I shake my head back at him. I can feel a slow fire building in my gut, and as Ulric speaks, I feel it flare up my chest. I stare at him, sure that flames must now be leaking out of my eyes. "I will find a way", I growl. "For them!" I wave my hand towards the woman and the girl.

Something makes him uncomfortable, and instead of speaking, he just nods again.

For a moment there is only silence.

"Come, then, Reynir. It is time to go", he says, and he opens the door. A cold wind whistles around my feet. He steps outside.

I stand and follow him, their silent eyes heavy upon my back.

"Goodbye, my friend." Ulric embraces me, mounts up, and turns north.

As I walk east, I hear their footsteps behind me.

For my wife and my daughter, I will find a way.



The door to the old man's cell creaks open. The senior of the monks in the old man's cell bows his head slightly as the Abbott enters.

The Abbott looks down at the pale, still form. There seems to be no motion; no perceptible rise and fall of the broad chest beneath the thin, woollen blanket. He turns and raises an enquiring eyebrow to his brethren.

"He has passed?"

The senior monk shakes his head.

"Then it will not be long." The Abbott casts an eye around the gloom of the cell. "Fetch candles", he says to the most junior monk.

The other men wait patiently for him to return, two large metal candlesticks in hand. The cell is small and crowded. It smells faintly of decay. As the young monk places the first candlestick on the floor, it tilts on a crack on the stone, teeters, and then suddenly comes down with a ringing clang. The Brothers in the cell jump at the sudden noise, and the old man's eyes snap open, locking tight on the Abbott's. In them, the Abbott sees a startlingly intense clarity of thought. Inexplicably, he feels

giddy, a pounding rush pushing at the edges of his vision as if he has stood up too quickly. He finds that he cannot look away, even as the old man's deep blue eyes seem to swell, until they fill the Abbott's field of vision like an ocean; and for a moment the Abbott feels as if he stands on the precipice of death with the old man – somewhere between Heaven and Earth – and he feels sickness, grief and anger course through him, passed from the old man like a cup of sacramental wine.

The Abbott feels the taste of bile in the back of his throat and fights back the urge to vomit. What is happening? Has he been caught in the dying man's vortex, travelling to Judgement alongside him? The Abbott feels the cold shiver of panic, for he has not confessed, and his soul is not ready to face Judgment.

The young monk who dropped the candlestick gently reaches out to Brother Reynir and strokes his forehead. The old man's eyes flicker to the younger man, and the vision breaks.

The Abbott shudders at the coarse reality of the room. Sweat soaks his back. The other monks stand unperturbed, clearly unaffected by this vision.

The old man's eyes are closed once again.

Shaken, the Abbott clears his throat. "Prepare him."



"Are you prepared? You know what Abbey life demands?" He holds up his hands, and with his left ticks off each of the fingers on his right, "Devotion. Obedience. Patience. Humility. Celibacy."

I nod.

"And your profession?"

I hold up my hands; thick, powerful fingers; the lacework of scars and pits running across my tendons and forearms; mostly hairless.

"Blacksmith," states the Abbott. I nod. "Then you are a valuable man, Reynir." He looks me over again. "And young. Do not doubt the temptations of the flesh, Reynir. You do not wish to take a wife?"

I stare, thinking again of their reproachful eyes as I left them outside the Abbey, a place where they could not follow. *This is the only way!* I wanted to cry out to them. But instead, I said nothing.

He looks at me curiously, challenging. The silence lengthens and grows awkward.

I do not know what to say next. The Abbott frowns. "Reynir. Most of the brethren have come to this calling through family status, or old age. Why is it that *you* wish to take the Vow?" he finally says.

I sit forward. "Abbott, I wish to know the mind of God," I state flatly.

The Abbott raises his eyebrows. "Have a care, blacksmith! You cannot know the mind of God, anymore than a worm may know your thoughts!"

I bristle, but do not respond. The Abbott leans forward, eyes now narrow. "Tell me. Are you a pious man, Reynir? Are you a man that truly wishes to be closer to God?"

My heart starts pounding. *Do I wish to be closer to God? Oh, yes, Abbott! Close enough that he will feel the damp of my breath on his face!*

I bow my head so he cannot see my face, but I am sure I must be trembling – again, like when Ulric awoke me three months previous, I feel like an ale barrel filled too full, the staves bowing to the internal pressure, hoops barely containing the rage within. And that muscle below my right eye begins to twitch. *God's bones!* I curse to myself, *control yourself, Reynir!* *Now is not the time!* I close my eyes and breathe deeply. "Yes."

"Yes, Abbott," he corrects me.

"Yes, Abbott," I respond, looking up again at the old man. He waits for more, and I seethe. This is more awkward than I imagined. *I need to be accepted here. Only a fool fights with the unknown*, Ulric was fond of saying. Despite the years I fought the Saracen in His name, I have come to realize just how little I know of Our Lord. But here within the Red Abbey's thick sandstone walls is the greatest repository of Biblical knowledge in all of northern Europe – and the scholastic devotion that I hope will help me unlock its secrets. When I next go to battle, it will not be as a fool.

So again, I force down the rising anger – the anger that has come to define me more with every day since I embarked on this pilgrimage. *Forgive me, my loves.*

I can sense the old man's doubt. *Sometimes the truth is the best lie*, Ulric's wisdom again echoes in my head. Yes. The truth.

"Abbott," I say boldly, "I have much to atone for. In my remaining time, I wish only to learn all I can of the Almighty, so that I may be best prepared to meet Him in His Kingdom."

The Abbott nods and leans back in his chair, continuing to study me. It is a long moment before he speaks.

"Yes. I do believe you. But let me be frank, Reynir. *Ora et labora!* This is how we live. The Red Abbey is a place of silence and contemplation, of work and of study. I am not sure it is for the likes of you; I smell the stink of violence about you."

My heart rate accelerates again. He pauses. "The Duke is raising a force," he says. "The Northern heathens stir again, and he plans to take the sword of God against them. If it is atonement that you seek, then it seems to me that you would be better suited to join his host. A blacksmith would be most welcome." He nods to himself and begins to rise.

NO!

I cannot reach down to my feet fast enough. "Abbott? My sword arm has toiled for our Lord enough." He pauses, raising an eyebrow in enquiry. I grunt and with both hands I place my leather saddlebag in front of him. It thumps and clinks on the wooden tabletop with a satisfying, substantial weight. I have his attention again. He blinks. "This wealth," I wave my hand, "I brought back from Outremer."

"Crusader!" He looks at me sharply, re-assessing, and sits back down.

"I fully understand that, should I be accepted here, then I have no more need of...these earthly trappings."

He opens the saddlebag and looks inside. Then, he smiles.

"Welcome to the Red Abbey.... Brother Reynir."



The prone form of the old man has been washed and dressed anew in clean robes; all earthly traces of sin removed from his physical form.

Now, five monks are arranged evenly around the cot – two on each side, and one at the foot. Quietly at first, their voices dusty – like a scroll unrolling after many years of disuse – the monks begin to intone the Viaticum, a deep, rhythmic chant, preparing the soul of the old man for the onward journey.

The irony of sending the old man to Judgement with the voices of others echoing in his ears is not lost on the monks, for none of the men standing in the room know the timbre of his voice: he has not spoken a single word – even when allowed to on Feast Days or in response to Father Abbott – in thirty-three years...



“Brother Reynir!” his voice rings stridently, echoing across the scriptorium.

I look up from the vellum, blinking. I have been too long working in the dim candlelight, and I have to screw up my eyes repeatedly, trying to stretch my muscles and force myself to focus on his relatively distant face. I briefly look around the scriptorium, only now realising that I alone remain at work.

Always, I am so alone. My loves, what has become of you?

Abruptly, a massive yawn cracks my jaw and I place my hands on my lower spine and arch to stretch my taut back.

“Well?” says the Abbott, impatiently.

I stand slowly, stretch again, and then wave my right hand at the vellum in front of him, indicating he should approach and take a look. Vexation dances across his face. Wulfstan has been Abbott but a month but already he wears his position like a crown. He

snorts his annoyance and strides over. "What?" he snaps. "Is it done?"

I narrow my eyes and curtly I wave my hand again. Like all Brothers, I took a Vow of Silence – ordinarily, this Vow allows an exception for the purpose of conversing with the Abbott – but I have not spoken in almost twenty years, and he knows it.

I am not the only Brother at the Red Abbey to have eschewed all speech entirely. There are three others, each of whom exudes an aura of serenity, as if by refusing to contribute to the noise of the world they are somehow isolated from it. I confess that even I take some comfort from the still waters of their presence.

But *my* silence? Mine is the silence of the ice dam on the edge of Spring, pregnant with violence.

And now is not the time for that. *Not yet.*

Finally, he sighs theatrically, looks down and then his breath catches. He does not speak for a long, long moment. We are so still and silent that if another Brother had walked into the scriptorium at that time, they would surely have mistaken us for statues.

The large vellum on which I have been working is the last in the series, and I know it is my finest. Ever since joining the Red Abbey, I have worked tirelessly on this skill, first as an apprentice to Brother Conan and then, when he died, as a master in my own right. With time, word of my talents reached the Holy See, and then one day Cardinal Embracio arrived from Rome, charging me to produce this work: each illuminated plate depicting a scene from the Book of Revelations, and all to be bound together into the Pope's own personal copy of the Bible.

Here, the scene of Biblical carnage is as detailed and gripping in its intensity as I could make it. The eyes of the Damned as they flee from Judgement are full of fear. Wulfstan takes it all in slowly. The work is charged, alive, knowing. I can almost feel what I have done.

Eventually, he straightens. "Yes, Brother Reynir," he says quietly, eyes still upon the plate. "That will do. That will do very well." Out of the corner of my eye, I see him nod once, and then he turns and quickly walks out of the scriptorium.

When the echoes of his footsteps cease, the silence is absolute. It is the way I like it.

I bend down to blow out the candle, and it flickers in the sudden movement of air. The gold leaf on the vellum sparkles in response and draws my eye to the tiny figure in the midst of the illustrated mob, a detail I have carefully placed but which the Abbott was too dim to notice. I smile grimly to myself. Where all of the other Damned are running in fear towards the viewer and away from their fate, this one walks in the opposite direction, his back to the viewer, one arm raised, pointing at the far horizon. In his other the figure holds a flaming sword. The mob flow around him like a stream around a stone.

At the week's end the Cardinal returns to collect the finished vellum, and then I must wait to see if the prey takes the bait...



Some motion stirs in the old man's hands, a trembling that passes up through his limbs to arrive at his head, whereupon his eyes flutter open, like a bell responding to the uncertain pull of a first-year novice. An

audible breath stutters out from between his lips. Four of the monks continue their low, gentle chanting; the fifth leans over the old man.

"Brother Reynir?"

The old man nods weakly and the monk smiles kindly at him.

"Your soul has been prepared. The Lord waits to greet you. Go now, in peace."

The old man smiles back at the monk and ceases to tremble. He nods again, and the monk straightens, joining again his brothers in chant.



I am old. I can feel the creaking of age every time I try to move in my cot, see its shake in my spotted hands, hear its wheezing labour in my every breath. In the years since the Cardinal collected the vellum, Abbott Wulfstan has succumbed to fever. Thus, I have outlived yet another Abbott and my antediluvian existence has made me something of a legend among the monks of the Red Abbey. Touched by God! they say among themselves. Oh, the unknowing irony. Of those that gather around my cot, none remain that can remember when I took the Vow; none even remain that can recall the sound of my voice.

I had taken the Vow, all those years ago, precisely for the reason I told the first Abbott: to know the mind of God. I studied and read, and read and studied, until my eyes burned. The Holy Book itself, Papal encyclicals, treaties and musings by philosophers, scholars and kings. In my desperation, I sought for some flaw, some weakness – among so much knowledge, I was convinced that there must be a path to vengeance. It took years, and at times the rising waters of despair almost extinguished the fiery rage that kept driving me.

Almost.

Eventually, though, I found what I was seeking. The obviousness of it was like a physical blow. *The Word of God!* Yes! The Holy Father speaks for God and what he proclaims to be doctrine *is* doctrine; thus, as on Earth becomes in Heaven.

But how to use that knowledge? It was agony, knowing I had discovered the weapon but having no idea how to deploy it. And then, by chance, the Cardinal gave me the opportunity.

Since they were delivered, the Holy See has studied in-depth my illuminated plates. My workmanship – driven by my singular, outrageous purpose to achieve a clarity that would otherwise never have been in my reach – has been declared divinely inspired by the Holy Father himself. God has been working through me, he claims.

The trap did spring because the prey was willing.

Now, the monk with the flaming sword – the figure which I subtly inserted into each of the plates – has been embraced by the Church as a new vision to the gospel of Revelation. He has been named *Eversor*, “the Destroyer”.

Eversor, the Holy Father has preached, is the physical embodiment of man’s earthly sin; sin that has become so rampant, so powerful, that it threatens God Himself, just as the Muslim once again threatens Jerusalem.

The dark shadow of *Eversor* has spread throughout Christendom at the urging of the Pope: against those who once hoped that Heaven would provide a consolation for their miserable, Earthly existence, the Pope has unveiled the threat of true Apocalypse – the death of Heaven itself. Their fear has been fashioned into a

weapon of fanaticism unlike any that has gone before. Already, a second Crusade has tens of thousands marching to the nascent Kingdom of Outremer, from where they will fervently deal and receive death in the name of God, for the Pope has decreed that only when the Saracen heretic is wiped from the Holy Land will *Eversor* be defeated.

Watching my plan unfold has been beautiful. The Holy Father speaks the Word of God, and the Word of God has power: thus, as he preaches, it is so. *He has made Eversor real.* It is so, so dearly, painfully beautiful that I want to laugh.

But instead, I cough.

The edges of my vision are dimming as I feel the cold of the room deepen. I am like a man languishing at the bottom of a deep well, watching the sky as night closes in: slowly, so slowly, the aperture of light is shrinking and as it does, my vision fails. Eventually, even my hands are but shapes in the wider darkness. And when, finally, the aperture closes I can see only grey mist. Grey, which then gradually deepens to black.

Now the sound of the praying monks begins to fade. Unlike the slow dissolution of my sight, my hearing degrades so quickly that it startles me – the chant quickly mutating into garbled noise that my brain can no longer make sense of – and then there is silence. Like the darkness before my eyes, it is absolute.

There is only feeling now. Feeling and thought. The icy cold deepens, and the thin woollen sheet drawn across my chest starts to exponentially increase in weight. Each breath becomes a battle; my lungs straining against the cloth ever more weakly with each inhalation.

Finally, my lungs cease their futile resistance. My mind struggles for one more breath, but my body has stopped cooperating.

There is no pain.

There is no feeling anymore.

And now, the ice dam of self-control that I have nurtured for a lifetime creaks, and cracks, and then collapses.

I shriek within myself. A long, shuddering, animal wail. YOU!

I re-live it. I re-live it all. All that terrible agony. Desperate, I smash down the boarded-in door, Ulric behind me as we burst into the dark, hopeless place that I once called home. I see the prone, desiccated forms of my wife and daughter, long since dead. The beauty and vibrancy that once animated them: gone. Twisted, eroded, they each lie like an abandoned husk.

And I am burning. God! IT WAS YOU!

I moan in grief, my head hung low, endless tears obscuring my vision as the small crucifix that I wear around my neck swings back and forth in front of my face.

The crucifix...

I am an inferno. Father! IT WAS YOU!

The necklace shatters against the wall as I surge to my feet, roaring and screaming.

I am a shrieking incandescence. Lord! IT WAS YOU!

With furious abandon I lay waste to my home – hacking, kicking, punching, screaming. I am grief and impotence. I am guilt.

YOU DID THIS!

I am transformed, and I am risen again.

I am RAGE, I am ROARING, I am FLAME!

I AM EVERSOR

and I am come...

...for...

you...



"Eversor."

All Rights Reserved © Graham Harris 2020.

Special thanks to Laura Vezzer and Nuala McLaren for their suggestions and encouragement.

A TRINITY OF RAGE

I — RAGE. CORPOREAL

Freed from flesh,
I wear my spite as armour
And within my fists rage is weaponized:
Imbued with grief
And sharpened on my pain
I bear my lifetime's fury into battle...

Across the astral plain I have come for You!

I see Your looming form upon the dim horizon
Eyeless and repugnant, the Eminence of Evil.
I shake with tension, I can almost taste revenge;
My hands will still the beating of Your cold, black heart...

I am rage made real!
I am rage made corporeal!

I
AM
RAGE
MADE
REAL.

II — RAGE. BESIEGED

The dais from which you reign is seven levels high
Seven mountains, black with soot, clutching at the blood-
laden sky
Seven hordes, seven horrors, seven times to face the night
But the rage within my soul has seven times their might!

Into the crimson lash I bend my will
Into a storm of claws and fear
But I am unbowed and
My wrath grows
Ever hotter and fiercer still.

Then...

Amidst the shrieking carnage of my progress
On the last of seven levels
Is unveiled the pinnacle of Your cruelty:
My wife...my daughter...

Against me are arrayed
And their features are crippled with hate,
The swords of bone they wield
Rend me deep with every thrust,
For all my rage is no defence
Against the cutting edge of guilt:
"Where was I? Where was I?"

Gloating, you descend upon my broken form

Malignancy roils before you like a cloud of poison:
And in your shadow, they writhe again
And in your shadow, they die again
Accelerated plague to claim them once again
And I lose them...and I lose them once again.

Too late
You realize Your mistake:
What You thought would crush me
Only re-ignites me
And from my eyes I pour forth fire!

Rising to my feet again!
Rising to my feet again!

I will finish what I've begun -
I will finish what I've become.

III — RAGE, CONSUMMATED

My faith, once clean, is long since jaded
And I am become Your reckoning,
For all these years I've raged and hated
But now I stand before You.
I marched for Your glory -
You paid my wage in death.

I've carved apart Your angels
and hacked Your demons down:
Your realm's a burning ruin -
mockery is now Your crown!

I am *Eversor*
And now You'll die.

Face me! Among the ashes of Your throne
You are reduced - You are frail and quivering,
For in Heaven as is on Earth
And my power is now Gospel!
I am unleashed from mortal form
And I burn like a *million* fires.

I consume even Your screams
within my blazing, wrathful vengeance:
Then - like charcoal on the wind -
I dissolve my very essence:

I was *Eversor*, and now I'll die.

So now, I rest
So now, I cease
So now, I rest:
At last
At peace.

"A Trinity Of Rage."

All Rights Reserved © Graham Harris 2020.