

The dagger behind the glass display looked old - well-maintained, but of ancient design. Waryr gave it a sidelong glance, trying to avoid the shopkeeper's gaze. He'd had enough of salesmen and their aggressive practices in this city.

Hallowbay was by far the largest city Waryr had yet visited in his travels. To be sure, it was one of the largest cities on the continent of Kevane, but Waryr was more accustomed to the small towns and villages along the southeast coast, where he'd grown up. Hallowbay was five times the size of his hometown by land area, but nearly twenty times the size by population. It was crowded, constantly, and he hated it. But that also meant it was an excellent place to gather information.

"Aye, she's a beaut, isn't she?" a voice interrupted his thoughts. He quickly trained the annoyance from his expression and turned to face the shopkeeper.

"Pardon?" he asked. The shopkeeper tapped on the glass case, smirking.

"This dagger you've been trying not to eye," he said. Waryr allowed himself a quick glance down at the blade. "You interested?"

"I'm undecided," Waryr responded, glancing around as if there may be more interesting things to spend his money on. There weren't.

The shopkeeper frowned and likewise glanced around. No other customers in at the moment. He needed a sale. He leaned across the counter.

"You don't want to know the, uh, history of the blade?"

This caught Waryr's attention, though he tried to hide it. He leaned down slightly for a closer look at the dagger. The blade itself was a metal that he didn't recognize, but the handle and small crossguard were lacquered wood. The longer he stared, the darker the wood seemed to stain. After a moment, he started to feel queasy, and had to look away. He straightened and closed his eyes.

"From the design," he started, "I'd guess it dates back to the Fiusir Kingdom, so it's at least three hundred years old. Not sure what that metal is. Is it enchanted?"

"Ah, a scholar are ya?" the shopkeeper said with a nod.

"You could say that."

"Well, there's more to it than just being an old dagger. Enchanted ain't the word I'd use, this blade is... *cursed*. And not just any curse, mind you. Cursed by a god of death!" The shopkeeper's facial expression and gesticulation made it clear he was doing his best to really sell the story - and the item. Waryr scoffed.

"A god of death? You believe in that type of nonsense? Even here, in the City With No Gods?"

The shopkeeper pursed his lips, leaned back, and crossed his arms.

"Never you mind then," he grunted. Waryr waited for further comment, but none was forthcoming. Unusual, for a salesman to let his pitch end so easily and abruptly. He decided to prod a bit further. After all, he was here for rare artifacts, myth or not.

"I apologize, sir," he said, glancing back down at the dagger. "I've only been in Hallowbay less than two weeks' time, so most of what I know is from reputation and rumor. I meant no offense. Can you tell me about this curse? About this... 'god of death' that you refer to?"

The shopkeeper's face remained stoic, but he at least uncrossed his arms and let his palms rest on the edge of the countertop.

"I'll give you the meaning of our city's moniker then," he said, and Waryr thought that his tone of voice suddenly sounded more...real. The pretense of customer service and sales pitches was gone. This was a man with information that he needed to share, whether currency was to be exchanged or not. Waryr allowed his intrigue to show on his face without trying to mask it.

"Hallowbay is the 'City With No Gods' as you say, but not because we have no belief in greater beings. Rather, we welcome all people within our walls. We expect and enforce no particular religious doctrine, only a doctrine of peace, respect, and fair trade. It may be more fitting to describe Hallowbay as the 'City of All Gods.' Myself, particularly, I've got no strict beliefs in gods or goddesses or religious affiliation, but that don't mean there isn't something out there that I can't wrap my head 'round. A 'higher power' than me - don't take much to have more power than I do, does it? Is that how we define a god?"

Waryr was taken aback by the shopkeeper's explanation. It was philosophical, even bordering on the existential. This was the type of conversation he missed from his university days. He smiled.

"You make good points," he replied.

"Of course I do," the shopkeeper said. "What else does a man like me have to do with his spare time aside from thinking?" There was a flash of amusement in his eyes before he glanced back down at the dagger. "The god of death and the curse I mentioned, I'll welcomingly admit that's more just a rumor, but it so happens it's a rumor I put good stock in." He pointed through the glass countertop at the dagger. "Every person we've had record of that's owned this knife has ended up dead, and not in a peaceful way. I'm hesitant to even sell it, given its history, but my wife worries it'll somehow work its curse on me if I keep it in inventory too long."

There it was. Waryr's interest in the story sank like a stone in the river. *I'm hesitant to even sell it.* That was a salesman's pitch. Talking up the supposedly morbid history (certainly, if Waryr requested these "records" he'd mentioned, they mysteriously wouldn't be available) and leading up to saying he didn't want to sell it. It was a way of increasing the perceived value of the thing in question.

Waryr glanced down and confirmed there was no tag on the item stating an asking price. The story was meant to convince potential customers to make an offer, which the shopkeeper would stoically refuse, claiming "moral responsibility" for potentially putting someone's life in danger, until the customer was so desperate for the blasted thing they were willing to offer a far inflated price. Waryr knew these tactics well, though he had to admit this shopkeeper's attitude and tone had nearly convinced him of the man's sincerity. He sighed.

"How much would one expect to pay for an artifact with such a morbid history?" he asked. The shopkeeper shuddered. Not the reaction Waryr was expecting.

"You... *want* to buy it?"

"You *want* to sell it, do you not?"

"Honestly, boy, I'm torn. I want it out of my possession, yes, but if I sell it to someone who isn't prepared for the magic that it holds, is their death on my shoulders?"

Waryr noticed that the entire time the shopkeeper spoke, his eyes were locked on the dagger, rather than on the customer in front of him. Another strategy to make himself seem more sincere?

"Unless you're the one that cursed it, or the one that drives the blade into their heart, I don't believe anyone would ever hold you culpable for such a death. Besides, I don't believe in any such curses. Frankly the whole thing sounds like the invention of a salesman creating drama for the sake of coin."

The shopkeeper still didn't look up. Waryr tried to gauge his expression, but with the man staring down at the dagger, the angle made it difficult to see his eyes. The shopkeeper sighed.

"Take it," he said quietly. Waryr furrowed his brow in confusion. "It's been givin' me bleedin' nightmares since I got it in. For transaction record purposes, we'll say you've given me a single coin for it. Just... be cautious." He unlocked the glass case that held the dagger and several other trinkets and gestured for Waryr to reach in and take it. Waryr hesitated.

"You aren't haggling," he said. "You really believe in this curse, don't you?"

"I don't know about no gods of death, but I do know I don't understand the first thing about magick. There's something about this thing that makes me queasy, and all I've got is the story I was told about it. If there's magick that can create that kind of curse, there's someone out there with knowledge of that magick, and I don't much like it."

Waryr nodded. Maybe this shopkeeper was more honest than he'd thought.

He reached into the glass case and wrapped his fingers around the handle of the dagger. It was cool to the touch, but otherwise didn't feel any stranger than any other wooden handle. He inspected the metal of the blade a bit more closely now that he could hold it. It still wasn't familiar to him.

The shopkeeper closed the glass case and locked it again, avoiding eye contact. Waryr took a single coin from his pocket and placed it on the countertop.

"Have you got a box or something I can carry this in?"

The shopkeeper bent down to grab what looked like it may once have been a jewelry box. Fine satin lining on the interior. Intricately carved wood trim around the corners. He slid it across the counter.

"I won't touch the damn thing if I don't have to," he muttered. "You can keep the box too."

Waryr carefully rested the dagger in the satin lining and slid the lid over the top. He resisted a shiver crawling up his spine.

"Thank you sir," he said. The shopkeeper nodded, still refusing to make eye contact. Waryr slid the box into his coat pocket, nodded, then took his leave, ducking under the fabric curtain that hung over the entryway.

He stopped briefly on his way to pick up fresh fruit for his dinner, then returned to the room he'd been renting for the past two weeks. The door creaked as it opened, then creaked again as it closed. There was a draft that he'd yet to plug, but the weather this time of year was tolerable, so he paid it little mind. The bed left much to be desired; it was obvious the room had been rented out for years with little attention given to replacing the furnishings once they'd been worn out.

At least it was relatively cheap, though that wasn't saying much considering the average cost of lodging in a city like Hallowbay was triple what he'd been paying back home.

He put one of the fruit on a makeshift cutting board and the rest in a bowl he'd picked up years prior that was enchanted with ice magic to keep anything in it at a temperature that extended its freshness. The one on the cutting board he started into, peeling the outer layer before cutting the flesh into thin slices. What small amount of juice squeezed out ran into a notch he'd cut into the board, then flowed down into a canteen.

He skewered slices onto a thin steel pole and set them over the fire to roast. He pulled the jewelry box from his coat pocket and set it on the desk between an old book and a scroll that was trying to furl itself back up. He pulled the scroll straight again, setting the old book on one edge and an inkwell on the other to hold it open. The scroll had the sigil of the Fiusir Kingdom stamped on the top right corner. Satisfied, he returned to the fire and slowly rotated the skewered fruit to make sure they cooked evenly.

Once they were roasted through, he ate them slowly, savoring the semi-sweet flavor. The texture of the roasted fruit flesh reminded him of a fish that was common in the waters near his hometown, but thankfully it didn't taste at all the same. As he ate, he thought about some of the Fiusirian myths he'd read.

*The Age of Small Kings*, written just before the fall of the Fiusir Kingdom some two hundred or so years prior, included several references to the gods venerated by much of the Fiusirian populace. He didn't remember there being a Fiusirian god of death, but that didn't mean there hadn't been one in their pantheon. Besides, most Fiusirian weaponry was forged from a relatively basic steel alloy. This dagger didn't appear to be made of the same material.

He finished the fruit and washed it down with a few quick gulps of water before pulling a chair up to his desk to begin his work.

He'd been researching Fiusirian artifacts for years. It was the specialty he'd pursued during his education. The dagger had caught his eye because of its design - that aspect of it was definitely Fiusirian.

He opened the box and took the dagger out. The handle no longer seemed to be fading into darkness the longer he looked at it, leading him to believe his mind had simply played a trick on him in the shop.

He lit the lantern on his desk and moved it closer, watching how the light played against the metal of the blade. It created a rainbow sheen on the metal that moved along the blade depending on the angle he held it. He glanced over the scroll, but he already knew it had no mention of the dagger, so he flipped the book open and started skimming through pages, the weapon still turning over in his hand.

That night, he slept fitfully. He'd not found a reference to the dagger in the book he'd been reviewing, and had been exhausted by the time he got to the end of it. Too tired, even, to crack open the next reference book that he might find some information in.

In his dream, he was someone else. He wasn't quite sure who, he only knew the body he inhabited didn't feel familiar. He dreamed he was fighting someone on a battlefield, someone whose armor bore the familiar emblem of the Fiusir Kingdom. He tried to speak, but this strange body seemed to move of its own accord rather than obeying his commands.

After a few minutes of back-and-forth, the Fiusirian knight lunged forward and plunged a blade into Waryr's gut. Pain radiated from the wound, more pain than he'd ever felt in a dream before. The knight pulled the blade out of the wound and Waryr pressed both hands against the flow of blood. His mind was focused so heavily on the pain that it took him several seconds to

realize he had actually awoken. He was back in his body, back in his rented room in Hallowbay, drenched in sweat.

He took a deep breath to steady himself. He hated it when his dreams felt so real. Dreams were meant to be just that - dreams.

After a moment, he sat up in bed and winced in pain. His hand flew to his stomach, just left of center, but he felt nothing there. He lit the lantern by his bedside and used it to examine where he'd felt the jolt of pain. Nothing. No marks, no scars, no bleeding. Must have pinched something in his sleep without realizing it.

He sat for several minutes trying to recall as many details from the dream as he could, but it was slowly fading from his waking memory. The pain in his stomach subsided and he got to his feet and stretched. The dagger rested on the satin lining of the jewelry box, just where he'd left it the night before.

He took a moment to rinse his face and run water over his matted hair. Better water than sweat, he supposed. Other than studying, he had no plans for the day. He picked the smallest of the fruit from the basket and bit into it. The cool juice was refreshing, and the texture of the fresh fruit was much more appealing than it had been roasted.

The book he needed was on the top shelf above his bed. He pulled it down with his free hand and sat cross-legged on the bed. Taking bites of the fruit while flipping through pages of the book, he eventually found a passage that talked about cursed weapons. He finished the fruit and tossed the core into the embers of the fire from last night, then rinsed the sticky juice from his hand.

He read through the passage on cursed weapons, but it gave him little more information than he'd already had. He continued through the rest of the book, stopping to read various passages that seemed relevant.

He found what he suspected was a brief mention of the blade's metal - nightsilver. He glanced across at the dagger. It didn't seem like what he'd previously heard of nightsilver. After all, he hadn't had any trouble seeing it. Maybe it was an alloy.

He checked the appendix of the book for other mentions of nightsilver and found only a reference to another book, one that he didn't have readily available. He muttered something about never having the right supplies for research, but wrote down the name of the book and the author. He'd have to go find a copy of it later. For now, he skimmed through the rest of his current book for any additional information.

By the time he was ready for lunch, he'd gotten to the end of the book without finding anything else of much value, save the name of two other books that he would also need to hunt down. He hoped beyond hope that this research would be worth it, and he'd be afforded access to a proper library afterward.

He ate a bit of leftover lamb stew from lunch the day before, heated over the fire, before setting out. The search for these books took the remainder of the day, and he only managed to find the one on Fiusirian metallurgy. The other two he'd need to track down later.

He picked up a basket of eggs and bread from a vendor just before they closed their stall for the night, then returned home. He sliced a bit of bread from the loaf and fried it with the egg for dinner. Good, but it needed a bit of spice, which he didn't have.

He started skimming the metallurgy book, but it didn't take long to find exactly the page he was looking for. In fact, it had more information than he'd expected. On the left hand page

was an illustration of the exact dagger he'd bought the day before, including the rainbow effect from an unseen light source. He moved to the desk, picked up the dagger, and rested it on the page for a more direct comparison. No doubt about it, this was the same dagger - unless it was mass-produced, a thought that briefly flitted into his head, but he disregarded, since this was the first of its kind he'd ever seen. He started reading the passage on the next page.

It started with a very flowery description of the dagger. If he'd been looking for something based just on the way it was described in this passage, he'd never have found the dagger. The description was quite embellished, but at least it told him what it was made of. He was right, it was a nightsilver alloy, mixed with ocrum. The nightsilver gave it the coloration and the rainbow effect in light, but the ocrum would give it spiritual properties as well.

Overall, it seemed to be a warning. In fact, it was strikingly similar to what the shopkeeper had said. Everyone who'd been known to wield the dagger had died in gruesome ways. The shopkeeper had been vague about it, but this record included names, dates, and causes of death. A disturbing number of suicides, it appeared. More than half of the entries listed claimed that the owner of the dagger had lost their mind and eventually slit their own throat with the dagger itself.

Towards the end of the passage, the book gave the blade a name. *Ghostbringer*. He couldn't find anything detailing why they'd chosen that name, just that it had something to do with lost memories. He scratched at the stubble that had started to grow on his chin.

By now it had grown late. He yawned and picked up the dagger.

"Ghostbringer, eh?" He set it back in the jewelry box, leaned back in his chair, and stretched. "I'll double-check some of these death reports with historical records in the morning."

He placed a torn scrap of paper on the page of the book that discussed Ghostbringer before closing the book and crawling into bed. He fell asleep quickly.

He dreamed another too-realistic dream that night. He was once again in a body that wasn't his. He took off his helmet and tossed it carelessly onto a pile of cloth. The helmet bore the emblem of the Fiusir Kingdom. He was vaguely aware of decorations and furniture in the room, but the person whose body he dreamt within was focused on only one thing - the dagger in their hand.

They held the dagger up and stared into the metal of the blade. Waryr recognized the blade as Ghostbringer, and his stomach lurched as he realized this was the same Fiusirian knight that had killed him in his dream the night before. Why was he aware this was a dream? Why could he remember a previous dream while having a separate dream? He'd never had any control over his dreams in the past. His mind raced as he tried to break himself away from the dream, but found he couldn't.

He was suddenly aware of tears streaming down his cheeks - or the cheeks of the knight his consciousness occupied.

"I can't," the knight whispered, still staring at Ghostbringer. The small portions of the wooden handle that were visible were noticeably darker now, just like they'd been when he'd first laid eyes on it in the shop. "I can't keep watching people die. I can't keep feeling their deaths inside me. It's too much."

Waryr tried to move the knight, but he was merely an observer. He had no control.

"I have died a thousand deaths before my own," the knight whispered. "Please, let me have peace." He dragged the blade across his throat and collapsed.

Waryr could feel the almost burning sensation of the skin on this throat slitting open, the air and the tears stinging the raw flesh under layers of skin. He felt the warmth of the blood as it flowed down his neck and pooled under the leather inner layer of the knight's armor. He felt the cool hard floor of the knight's chamber against his cheek. Mostly, though, he felt panic, as death took him.

He woke with a start, coughing and choking, pressing both hands against his throat to staunch the bleeding. After a minute, he pulled one hand away and looked at it, seeing there was no blood. None on his other hand either. He looked down at his chest and though his sleepclothes were once again soaked through with sweat, he saw no blood or other evidence of injury. He coughed a few more times to clear his throat.

Outside, it was still dark. He guessed he'd been asleep no more than an hour or so. He inhaled deeply and cast a sidelong glance at the jewelry box on the desk.

He didn't believe in curses or in vengeful gods. So long as he didn't believe, this so-called "curse" couldn't hurt him. The dreams were just a result of his overactive imagination, digging into this research and preying upon the kind of fears that dwelt at the edge of every man's consciousness.

He took several deep breaths to calm himself before laying back down and returning to sleep. No dreams visited him this time.

The more he researched the dagger, the more intense the dreams became, but still only one each night. It didn't seem to matter what time he fell asleep, how comfortable he was, or what thoughts he meditated on before falling asleep, the dreams still came. Every night, experiencing the death of someone new. Sometimes he could see Ghostbringer in the victim's vision, sometimes he just felt the prick of a sharp object before falling into oblivion.

It began to wear on him. Even though he eventually accepted that he would only have one of these types of dreams per night, it broke down his ability to sleep soundly, until he was averaging less than two hours of sleep each night, and those two hours were typically filled with dreams of death, so he couldn't call it necessarily restful sleep.

He was, after some hassle, able to cross-reference the deaths listed in the passage with official death records from the old Fiusir Kingdom. The list was accurate, so far as he could verify. The recordkeeper eventually forbade him from returning, at least until he could collect himself. Waryr didn't quite understand what the recordkeeper meant, until he caught his reflection in the bay on the way back home.

He was ghostly pale, his eyes sunken in and bloodshot, his hair disheveled. He hadn't shaved in weeks. Had he lost weight? His cheeks looked gaunt. Come to think of it, he couldn't quite remember the last time he'd eaten a proper meal. He was at the point of obsession in his research, the point where he'd resorted to a single meal a day - if you could call it that. Most days, his only nutrition was the same fresh fruit he'd bought that first night he'd found the dagger.

Speaking of... still staring into the water, he absent-mindedly reached a hand into his coat pocket and was confused as he wrapped his fingers around the handle of the dagger. When had he put it in his pocket? Why was he carrying it with him? For that matter, why was it loose in his pocket, rather than in the jewelry box?

He tore his gaze away from his reflection and hurried down the walkway a few paces before stopping. He looked around. He didn't recognize anything. He wasn't sure which district

of the city he was in, much less how to get back to his home. Did he have a home? He had trouble picturing what it looked like, what it was furnished with, and where it was. His bottom lip trembled.

"Sir?" a voice called out. Waryr whipped around and brandished the dagger in one hand. The young woman staggered back a few steps, her hands up and palms out as if to reassure him she was no threat.

"Who are you?" he croaked. His throat was drier than he could remember it ever being. He glanced down at the water in the bay longingly. "What do you want?"

The young woman steadied herself but kept her hands up.

"I want to help, sir. You look like you may be lost?" her inflection turned the statement into a question. Waryr looked around frantically, still unable to recognize his surroundings.

"I'm not..." he muttered. "I live... here." He was still pointing the dagger at her, but his hands were shaking.

The young woman reached into her cloak and pulled out a canteen. She undid the screwtop and gestured it at him.

"You sound parched. Here, take some water."

Waryr let his arm fall to his side and slid the Ghostbringer back into his pocket. He kept his grip on it as he edged forward, just close enough to snatch the canteen from the woman. He eyed the opening as he sloshed the liquid around, as though it might be poison.

His thirst overcame his paranoia and he tipped the liquid into his mouth. It was as she said. Water. He took a long deep gulp of the refreshing drink.

"Sir, there's a guard station just around the corner," the young woman said. Waryr took another, smaller, swig from the canteen and held it out for her to take it back. "Maybe they can help you find your way back home."

Waryr nodded, despite her words not truly registering in his mind. He only knew that he heard the word "home" and that he desperately wanted to go there.

The woman led him up some stairs, away from the water-level walkways, and around a corner. She rang a bell on a counter and waited. After a moment the window slid open and a guard's face appeared. He looked bored.

"Yes ma'am?" he asked. His eyes flitted to Waryr's disheveled form, but he seemed unfazed.

"Yes, hello, good afternoon," the woman replied. "This man seems to be lost. He looked confused down by the water so I've brought him to you to see if there's anything you can do to help."

The guard shifted his focus back to Waryr and looked him up and down.

"You live in the city, sir?" he asked. Waryr hesitantly nodded. "Come in. We'll get some information from you and make sure you make it home in time for dinner, yeah?" The guard pulled a cord inside his small building and a door to the left slid open.

The woman smiled and ushered Waryr inside. The room was sparsely lit, but enough light shone in from the window to make up for the small number of lanterns. The guard gestured to someone on the other side of the room and they brought over a stack of papers. Waryr took a seat in what was quite possibly the least comfortable chair he'd ever sat in.

"Do you know your name, sir?" the guard asked, looking at the papers rather than at Waryr.

"Waryr Deristian."

"Can you spell that for me?"

Waryr opened his mouth, but caught a glimpse of something metallic behind the guard. He shot to his feet, pulled Ghostbringer from his pocket, and lunged forward. The woman screamed and both guards tried to shout for him to drop the weapon, but he ignored them. He knew there was a threat and he was going to remove it before it removed him.

He felt the metal of the blade connect with flesh and tugged to the side. Warm blood flowed down the guard's neck, staining his light blue uniform crimson. The guard slapped one hand against the fresh wound in his throat and reached for his rifle with the other hand. Waryr slashed at the outreached hand, severing two fingers and cutting into the palm. The guard fell backward and kicked himself away from Waryr, trying desperately to keep his blood inside his body.

The other guard had his rifle lowered, aimed at Waryr. He lit the fuse on the back and braced for the explosion that would come. Waryr grabbed the woman by the arm and flung her in front of himself. The guard couldn't react fast enough. The polished ball of steel tore into the woman's chest.

Waryr pushed the woman at the guard and dove out of the building. He sprinted down the stairs and back along the walkway, unsure where he was going, but certain he needed to get away from those people.

After several minutes of running as fast and as hard as he could, he slowed to a stop and bent over, gasping hard to catch his breath. He strained to listen for any sound that would indicate he'd been followed. Nothing.

He still held Ghostbringer in an iron grip in his hand. Blood from the first guard covered that hand and down his arm, and a few splatters had made it to his clothes. He looked around for any familiar sites, but saw none. He shoved the dagger into his coat pocket, but didn't loosen his grip on it.

He made his way along the walkway, walking a bit faster than his usual pace, but trying not to look too conspicuous. He was certain every person he passed could see the word "MURDERER" painted on his face, but nobody attempted to stop him.

He wandered like this for hours until the number of people he passed dwindled and darkness settled around the city. As soon as he knew no one could see him, he ducked into the entryway of an aqueduct. He took his coat off and balled it up to rest under his head as he lay down.

"Just a nap," he growled. "Just a nap, then I'll find home." His grip tightened around Ghostbringer as he fell asleep.

His dream this time was, unfortunately, too familiar. He found, in his pseudoconscious dream state, that he knew exactly who he was and exactly where he was. This path, this road, this neighborhood - he'd traveled them many times in the months he'd been in Hallowbay. Why had he been so lost during his waking hours?

He tried to turn in the direction of home, but the body he occupied would not obey. He heard a bell ring and watched as his body strode to a window and slid it open. Outside stood the young woman and his own self, though he barely recognized his haggard form.

"Yes ma'am?" he heard from the mouth of the man he dreamt he was.

No, he thought. *Dear gods no.*

"Yes, hello, good afternoon," the woman replied. "This man seems to be lost. He looked confused down by the water so I've brought him to you to see if there's anything you can do to help."

"You live in the city, sir?" Waryr asked. He saw his living body hesitantly nod. "Come in. We'll get some information from you and make sure you make it home in time for dinner, yeah?" He pulled a cord inside his small building and a door to his right slid open.

He watched as the scene played out again, this time seeing it from the perspective of the guard he'd killed. He saw the madness in his own eyes as the blade lashed out and pierced flesh. Before his vision faded, he saw the woman's terror just before the other guard fired.

He woke, not with a start this time, but as if all of his strength had been sapped from his body. His bones ached, his muscles were taut and sore, and he shivered in the damp air. He crawled on his hands and knees to the edge of the water and stared into the sunken eyes of his reflection.

He was here, now. His mental faculties had returned. His memories had returned, along with the memories of others, and oh what memories they were. Memories of murder, of war and self-defense and assassination. Memories of suicide. The tears flowed and he couldn't stop them.

He became suddenly aware that he still held Ghostbringer in his hand. He sat back on his rear and held the dagger up. His eyes focused on the rainbow sheen of the blade. Nothing else in his vision registered as reality as the dark wood of the handle grew darker and darker until he was certain it would consume him. The queasiness he'd felt when this first happened at the shop was gone. In its place was a feeling of longing. Longing for home. Longing for justice. Longing for peace. He sighed.

"I have died a thousand deaths before my own," he whispered. His voice was hoarse. "Please, let me have peace." He jammed the blade of the dagger into his chest, directly into his heart, and fell into the bay.