

THE PEASANT

Written by

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OVER BLACK:

We hear soft footsteps along stone floors. Then an untying of rope, creaking. A breath held.

TITLES: *Once upon a time...*

An effort; the rope pulled. GONG! A church bell rings out:

Medieval Europe is a feudal society, driven by and for war.

The rope is pulled. GONG! Ominous, sonorous ringing:

Countries, kingdoms and city states across the continent battle each other for power and wealth.

GONG!

The rich, landowning classes are professional warriors. When a higher lord calls, they go to fight.

GONG!

The lower, peasant classes work their lands. In exchange for skills and labor, they are promised protection.

GONG!

When knights are not campaigning for king or country, many begin to form new organizations called "FREE COMPANIES".

One last effort. GONG! A heavy toll reverberates...

A company is a mercenary army that fights, extorts or plunders to enrich itself, free from any allegiance, or any concern for common people...

FADE IN:

EXT. HILL FIELDS - DAY

A hillside meadow, verdant grass and wildflowers. No medieval sepia tropes; COLOR pools and pulses throughout this world...

A small flock of sheep comes into view, driven from behind by a SHEPHERD, giving short clicks and whistles at them.

He wears peasant trousers, an open-necked shirt and unbuttoned doublet (snug jacket). He is strongly built, fit.

He leans on his stout crook while the sheep graze. He takes in the quiet. He is intensely present, rooted in his world in a way most of us today fail to be. Yet there is sadness behind his eyes, even as he smiles at blackbirds chasing each other.

OLIVER SHEPHERD could be 30 or 50 years old, it's hard to tell.
A man who's seen a lot and endured...

TITLE: TUSCANY, THE 14th CENTURY.

LUCA (O.S.)
Olivero! Ciao, Olivero!

Oliver turns to see a young boy, LUCA (9), running across the fields to reach him. Oliver gently signals *slow down*; don't scare the sheep. Luca slows to a walk, huffing.

LUCA
We finished turning the hay.
Mother called Father inside, with
the door shut. They'll be rutting,
I think.

Luca shrugs, a matter-of-fact smile. He looks up to Oliver, who gives the slightest nod -- *come on, then.*

EXT. NEAR FOREST - DAY

SNAP! A small stone pings into a fallen tree log, failing to hit a small cairn set up on it.

Luca is practicing with a SLING from forty yards away.

OLIVER
You're holding back.

LUCA
I don't want to get hurt again.

Luca rubs a small welt on his temple, a little forlorn.

Oliver reaches in his small leather satchel, pulls out the last round slinging stone.

Luca reaches to take it, but Oliver pulls it back.

OLIVER
Why do you want to learn to sling?

LUCA
I want to be able to fight.

OLIVER
Why?

LUCA
Because it's dangerous these days,
there are brigands about and --

OLIVER
No. Fear is no cause to fight.
(long beat)
What does a shepherd do?

Luca looks out at the sheep grazing in the sun.

LUCA
Protects them.

OLIVER
Why?

Luca thinks for a moment.

LUCA
They feed us and clothe us.
They're like family. We look after
them because... we can.

Oliver eyes him. He nods, then gives Luca the stone.

Luca steps back, loads it in the small pouch. He glances at the sheep. He carefully swings the sling around, gaining speed...

With a snap of the wrist -- the stone flies and strikes the cairn, knocking it over. The boy whoops with delight!

Oliver gives a little smile. Luca beams from the approval.

OLIVER
Go on now. Those are my best
slingers.

Luca starts across the field toward the log.

EXT. EDGE OF FOREST - MOMENTS LATER

Luca crouches behind the log, picking up small slinging stones.

He stands up, and freezes... seeing something ahead...

There, at the edge of the oak forest, stands A WOLF. It is heavier than Luca, cold eyes watching him.

TWO MORE WOLVES appear, flanking it. Luca is gripped by fear.

Without taking his eyes from them, he pulls the sling from his shoulder. Hands shaking, he fumbles the stones, dropping them.

The alpha wolf steps closer.

Luca catches one stone, loads it into his sling...

The wolf's ears go back. Considering a charge.

Luca is about to start swinging the sling when --

A crook gently hooks his arm, holding it still -- Oliver has arrived behind him.

LUCA
What do we do?

Oliver just stares hard at the wolves, unflinching.

After a few moments, the wolves look away, thinking better of it. They turn and disappear back into the forest.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE ROAD - LATER

Oliver and Luca walk behind the flock along a cart track.

LUCA
Maybe I could've killed one.

OLIVER
Then what of the other two?

Luca looks down, doubting himself.

OLIVER
You controlled your fear, and they saw it. That was enough.

LUCA
Didn't feel like enough.

Coming around a bend, they see black smoke billowing to the sky from behind distant hills.

LUCA
Another battle...! Father heard that the Florentines move against Sienna now. Oh I wish I could see a little of it, don't you? Must be so exciting!

Oliver's dark look suggests otherwise. They hear galloping, and see a group of HORSEMEN coming along the road up ahead.

LUCA
That's a knight! Olivero?!

OLIVER
Get them aside, quick now.

Oliver and Luca guide the sheep off the road through an opening in a crumbling low wall.

The riders slow to a trot, waiting for a clear path. AN OLDER LORD in finery and his MEN-AT-ARMS, glaring at our peasants.

Oliver and Luca bow their heads low before the higher class. Luca sneaks a glance at their colors, mail and swords, in awe.

The Older Lord swigs from a flask, rosy-faced, fat.

LORD VOLTERRA
You respect the way, shepherd.
Here, for your trouble.

He pings A COIN down to the boy. The horsemen thunder onward.

Luca peers at the coin, wide-eyed and beaming at Oliver. A generous gift.

EXT. PEASANT FARM - EVENING

A peasant cottage sits amid farm outhouses and gear.

We see Luca gesturing excitedly to his MOTHER, recounting the day, as she herds chickens into a coop.

INT. SHEEP BARN - SAME TIME

Oliver closes the sheep into the barn for the night.

He goes over to a water trough and washes his face and arms.

In a corner, his only possessions sit by a bed of hay bales; a woolen shirt, some candles, a jug, a book, and his crook.

He sits on a bale and reaches an arm under a haystack...

He pulls out just the edge of a CANVAS PACKAGE. Just checking it's still there; he pushes it back under as --

GIO (O.S.)
The boy said you fought off wolves
and befriended knights today.

Oliver turns to see Luca's father, GIO (40s), at the door. Kind heart under a gruff exterior, wiping dirt from his hands.

OLIVER
He has an active imagination.

GIO
That he does. But that's a real
silver piece he received, it'll
keep us well fed for a while.

OLIVER
I was just doing my job.

A beat, earnest respect between them.

GIO
Come on inside, join us for
supper.

INT. PEASANT COTTAGE - NIGHT

A simple home. Only a hearth fire and candles cast neon glows.

Luca's mother CHIARA gives a bowl of stew to senile NONNA.

CHIARA
Ecco lo, mama. It's your favorite.

Chiara takes a seat at the table with Gio, Luca and Oliver.

LUCA
...it was Lord Volterra himself!
He was in mail and had a bright
longsword, Papa. I wish I could
hold a real sword like that! Think
what tales of adventure he has! If
only I could meet him, maybe he'd
take me as squire.

Gio scoffs.

CHIARA
We're not high-born, Luca.

LUCA
The greatest, most noble fighters
in the world, protecting people.
Isn't that what it means to be a
knight, Papa? Lord Volterra would
raise his shield for us if we
needed.

GIO
Mayhap he'd protect his lands, if
he could put down his bottle.
Enough about him now, eat your
food.

Oliver watches Luca toy with the silver piece, lost in fantasy,
spinning it on the tabletop.

GIO (CONT'D)
Tomorrow we'll take the goats over
to market and then get to work
turning the south fields.

LUCA
I don't want to be a farmer.

CHIARA

Luca...

LUCA

I want to be a knight.

Gio slams his palm down on the spinning coin, taking it.

GIO

Listen here, boy. Them lords ain't like in Old Mateo's fairy tales. They're supposed to be leaders, aye, but all of them, no matter what side they're on, they fight for nothing but their own purse. Making themselves richer while we toil in the dirt.

(long beat)

This country is overrun with war. Brothers and cousins fighting each other now, for what? So one side's lords can own even more? Now foreign armies want a piece of it too, like wild dogs tearing apart a fallen sow. The knights you idolize, boy, they only take and take and leave destruction behind them. Honor, nobility...chivalry. It's a myth. It's gone from this world, if it ever existed.

A heavy beat. Chiara glances Gio, fuming.

OLIVER

I disagree.

Gio glares at Oliver, ready to take offense.

OLIVER

Someone once told me, honor is a day's work well done, using one's own talents well and true. A farmer's talent looks after the earth and its creatures, nourishes it so it can nourish others. I think maybe there's nobility in that.

Chiara smiles, taking Gio's hand on the table as he also relaxes, accepting this compliment.

CHIARA

Kind words well spoken, Olivero. Thank you.

Behind them, Nonna eyes Oliver with odd, unreadable intensity.

EXT. PEASANT FARM - DAWN

Oliver is up for a red sky dawn, pulling up water from the well. He sets the pail through a fence for SOLA THE DONKEY.

OLIVER
Good girl, Sola.

Sola nuzzles him then gets excited as he pours out feed.

LUCA (O.S.)
Olivero!

He sees Luca coming from the house with Gio.

OLIVER
Good morrow.

Gio eyes him, and Luca is excited, anticipating something.

GIO
Chiara reminded me -- it's been a month now since you showed up in the middle of the night, looking for shelter in our barn.

OLIVER
I'm grateful for your charity. I was in need. But if you wish it, I'll move on.

GIO
The sheep are healthy, the barn is clean, and now the boy can sling. Clearly, your talent is this work, and you've used it well and true to help us. So... if you'll stay, we'd have you through winter too.

LUCA
Will you stay, Olivero?! Please stay with us! We can make you a proper bed in the alcove!

He points up at the barn's second level, above the sheep.

Oliver smiles, touched by the boy's excitement.

He nods -- *thank you*.

LUCA
Yes! Mama, he said yes!

Luca runs back over to the cottage, where Chiara comes out.

Gio offers his hand, they shake.

OLIVER
Should I help with the fields
today?

GIO
No, need to fatten them sheep up
safely. Take them out to the
western slopes again.

OLIVER
Si, signore.

Luca comes running back with a little wooden sword.

LUCA
Olivero! Because you taught me to
sling, I can teach you to fence in
return!

OLIVER
Oh? I didn't know you were a
swordsman.

LUCA
En garde!

Oliver plays along, deflecting Luca's little jabs with his
crook until the boy breaks through and "stabs" him.

LUCA
You've got a lot to learn!

GIO
Go on and get ready, boy.

LUCA
Yes, Papa. Ciao!

OLIVER
Ciao, Luca.

Luca runs off again. The two men watch him, shadow-fencing as
he goes. Gio starts away as Oliver takes in the beautiful,
pastoral scene. Something cracks inside him...

OLIVER
Giovanni...

Gio turns. Oliver feels an earnest, emotional gratitude.

OLIVER

Thank you.

GIO

You keep your counsel, and I respect that. But just know that, when you're ready, we'd hear your story with open ears and hearts.

Oliver nods, and Gio leaves.

EXT. WESTERN SLOPES COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Oliver sits under a tree, as the sheep graze in the fields.

It's peaceful. Quiet. Grass waving in the breeze, insects droning past.

Oliver is lost in lonely memory... He snaps out of it as a butterfly alights on his crook for a moment.

He smiles as it flies away.

But then...

CLIP-CLOP, THUD, THUD... SLOW HOOF-FALLS NEARBY, approaching.

Oliver stands as A RIDER emerges from behind the tree, peering down at him. *How did he not hear this sooner?*

By the weapons and finer clothes, we know the rider is a KNIGHT, though not in full armor.

JANICK (30s) eyes Oliver with haughty disdain -- a 14th Century Patrick Bateman. Oliver dips his head.

OLIVER

My lord.

A DOZEN OTHER KNIGHTS on horseback come up around Oliver from all sides now, as well as some MEN-AT-ARMS (BASIC INFANTRYMEN) and behind them, horse-drawn SUPPLY CARTS.

Menace in the air. But Oliver remains still, calm.

The Knights have a sociopathic entitlement. Imagine self-important tech bros, taken back in time, made literal killers.

KNIGHT

Ah! I say, these sheep do have a shepherd, after all.

The knight looks at Janick as if to say, "What now?"

JANICK

You there. We wish to purchase
your flock. I can give you a whole
florin.

OLIVER

That's a generous offer, my lord,
but I cannot accept.

The knights bristle slightly, eyeing him like wolves.

Janick dismounts. Other knights follow suit, hands on hilts.

JANICK

You cannot accept?

OLIVER

Aye milord, I cannot.

JANICK

Why ever not?

OLIVER

These aren't mine to sell.

Janick is bemused by his lack of fear.

JANICK

I detect an accent. How did you
come to these lands?

OLIVER

I was wrecked here.

JANICK

Well. 'Tis Sunday and the Lord
teaches charity for derelicts. Two
florins then. That's more than
double their worth. Give half to
your lord, keep the other half
yourself.

Janick winks with a smirk, face to face now.

JANICK

I dare say you'd be the richest
pauper in this land, or you could
buy yourself passage home again.

Oliver matches his gaze.

OLIVER

It won't do. There's no home back
home anymore. Not for me.

Janick turns cold, tiring of Oliver's assuredness.

JANICK
Have you ever heard of The Red
Company, peasant?

OLIVER
No.

JANICK
Ten thousand march behind us and
the men are hungry. When they get
hungry, they take what they want.

Oliver eyes them all, feeling their menace. He knows he's in trouble here, but he won't compromise.

OLIVER
Well, sir, there's a market in
town. I would suggest you purchase
vittles there. They charge only
what it's worth, nothing more.

Janick glares, then he starts laughing in disbelief.

JANICK
A market! Of course that would be
the place. How careless of me.
Very well. We will try our luck
there. Would you do me the
kindness of pointing the way?

Janick gives a look to a knight behind Oliver... Oliver turns, raising his crook to point across the fields --

WHAM! Oliver is struck behind his head with a mace -- he goes down hard, barely conscious, then Janick is on him.

JANICK
Look at me. *Look at me!*

Bleary-eyed, bleeding, Oliver looks up into Janick's face.

JANICK
I forgive your insolence only this
once, as a fellow countryman. You
should have taken the coin.

He adjusts the rings on his fingers like knuckledusters, then punches Oliver hard, knocking him OUT COLD.

EXT. WESTERN SLOPES COUNTRYSIDE - LATER

Oliver comes to, groaning, at the base of the tree. He finds himself soaked in blood, searching for the wound.

Drops spatter on his face. He looks up. A sheep is nailed to the tree above him, entrails dangling.

Groggy from his head wound, he gets up, leaning on his crook. The flock is gone. He sees smoke in the valley, and his heart goes cold.

EXT. PEASANT FARM - EVENING

Oliver arrives to find the peasant family's house and barn in flames. He hurries forward, in shock.

He finds Chiara's body near the house. Her clothes torn open.

He stumbles onward through black smoke.

Outside the barn, Gio is slumped against a cart, holding Luca's lifeless body in his arms.

The boy was stabbed. The sling still hangs from his hand.

Gio is bleeding from a mortal gut wound too. He looks up as Oliver arrives...betrayal and anguish in his eyes.

Oliver falls to his knees, staring at Luca.

GIO

They were taking everything. All our food. They just pushed us aside until... They went in the barn. In the hay, they found a sword. A knight's sword. They said we must've stolen it. An unforgivable crime, they said. They turned on us, on Chiara.

(looks at Luca)

He tried to stop them, with his sling. He said we had to be brave. My boy... They killed my boy...

He's crying. Dying. Glaring at Oliver.

GIO

A sword, Olivero? Are you a thief? That's what you were running from? Luca believed in you. He thought you were a good man...

OLIVER

Gio...

But the farmer chokes, gasping...

His eyes fade, rolling inward... and he dies.

For a moment, Oliver just stares at them...

Then he falls forward, head to the ground, fingers clawing the dirt, flames roaring around him...

EXT. GRAVES - PEASANT FARM - NIGHT

By the moonlight, Oliver digs in the field behind the house.

He works with cold, mechanical intensity. Each spadeful of dirt is hard, punishing work.

Two graves are already dug. He is working within the third, when he hears a sudden cracking of wood from the house.

He stops, looking back at the black, smoldering ruin...

Another snap and a beam falls aside. A shadow steps out.

A ghoulish figure, hunched in dark cloth. It appears to see him, and starts toward him with unnerving, mad shuffles...

Oliver is ashen. He grips the spade, still.

The creature is muttering, moaning, rasping as it comes.

It stops ten feet away, near the bodies wrapped in cloth. Its face is shadowed by a shawl.

OLIVER

Are you alive? Speak, if you can:
what are you?

The creature turns its head to him, eerie.

NONNA

Hail, shepherd. Hail to thee,
pontiff's ward, hail to thee, il
uccisore di padre...

Nonna comes forward, eyes glazed, as if half in another world.

OLIVER

I did not kill him.

NONNA

Hail to thee, oathtaker,
boongiver, orderbreaker.

Oliver is unnerved. If this be dementia, her words cut too close for comfort.

OLIVER

Are you here? Or is this delirium?

She drops to hands and knees at the edge of the grave, eyes bulging, leering down at him in the dirt.

NONNA

Trouble brews and stews from the
ewes to you. A new path appears.
What can you do?

The ancient woman bleats like a sheep.

Suddenly she's up again, shuffling away, muttering to herself, disappearing into the darkness.

EXT. GRAVES - PEASANT FARM - MORNING

A grey, misty morning. Oliver stands over the covered graves, each with a small makeshift cross above it.

He stares down at them...

The grief is buried. Now there's cold, furious determination.

Sola the Donkey approaches, her fur a little singed. She nudges his arm with her nose. He looks at her.

He picks up his crook.

OLIVER

Alright. Let's go.

EXT. THE WALLS OF VOLTERRA - DAY

Blood-red banners flap in the grey wind. We drift forward through the ranks of THE RED COMPANY'S ADVANCE FORCE. About 50 MOUNTED KNIGHTS, 150 MEN-AT-ARMS, 100 SUPPORT CREW.

Hard-bitten mercenaries all waiting, still and quiet. These are foreigners, mostly English and German, come here seeking fortune among the ever-warring Italian city states.

They're outside the high stone walls of VOLTERRA, a small hilltop cathedral town that's ancient even in this time -- it's been inhabited since the 8th Century BC...

At the head of The Company we find its leader on horseback...

WERNER VON URSLINGEN (50s) is a tough, mean motherfucker who only cares about increasing his considerable money and power.

He chews an apple, staring at the closed, heavy town gates...

Slowly, they start to open...

A man rides out, flanked by a few armed men. He approaches, not quickly. LORD VOLTERRA is the same knight that Oliver and Luca met on the road earlier. Fat, dulled by drink, and... AFRAID.

WERNER
Lord Celesto di Volterra.

LORD VOLTERRA
To whom do I owe this pleasure?

WERNER
Duke Werner Von Urslingen, and
this is my Company. The Red
Company.

Lord Volterra's worst fears are confirmed.

WERNER
Have you heard of us?

LORD VOLTERRA
Yes...

WERNER
I like your town.

LORD VOLTERRA
Thank you.

WERNER
In Florence they told me about
your cathedral. Small but
beautiful. I'd love to see it.

Lord Volterra is flustered. He glances at Werner's breastplate, inscribed with snarling lions and Latin text.

Werner catches it, and glances down at it himself.

WERNER
You know what that says?

LORD VOLTERRA
Yes.

WERNER
What does it say?

LORD VOLTERRA
"Enemy of piety, enemy of
mercy...enemy of God."

[Note: This is actually true]. Werner stares at him, dead-eyed.

WERNER

You have a choice today, Celesto. May I call you Celesto? Celesto. I like saying it: Celesto di Volterra. Your language is so beautifully feminine, it tickles me. These are dangerous times, Celesto. War is catching here and there across the land, armies moving to and fro. It strikes me that your little town is quite vulnerable. I'd hate to hear of something bad happening to your lovely cathedral, or your noble keep, or indeed your fine people.

LORD VOLTERRA

I have men here, and high walls.

WERNER

They seem stout. But is it enough to withstand a siege, Celesto? Companies are coming here, from all across Europe. This is merely my forward party, the rest of my own company numbers almost ten thousand. I mention that just as an example of course.

(pause for effect)

I can offer you the service of The Red Company, to guarantee the protection of your town from thievery or brigands or wayward armies, in exchange for...

Werner's SQUIRE opens a scroll for him to glance at.

WERNER

...six hundred pounds of gold.

LORD VOLTERRA

Sir, my estates are small. We have no such sum!

Werner takes the scroll in hand, looking at it.

WERNER

Do you know what this is? This is a papal receipt showing your town's taxes and church contributions. Which it says here were... quite a lot. They tell me you have good iron in these hills.

(MORE)

WERNER (CONT'D)

Now, Hamid here is my accountant; they're good with numbers these Saracens. His mathematics tell me you can indeed afford it. So if you'd like our protection, I will happily give you one hour to produce our fee...

(beat)

If not, I'm afraid that you will remain vulnerable to attack.

The threat lingers. Lord Volterra is terrified, helpless.

LORD VOLTERRA

Your offer is very kind. Let me see what I can find.

He dips his head to Werner, turns, and rides back to town with his escorts. Werner glances up as DISTANT THUNDER RUMBLES.

INT. COMMAND TENT - LATER

Werner pores over a table full of maps with Hamid and others in his tent. Outside, it's starting to drizzle.

WERNER

Then what's next after Empoli?

HAMID

Greve, here, then at Arezzo we can get five hundred.

WERNER

Minus our benefactor's commission, would bring us to nine total. Then we'll drive to Pisa to negotiate the terms of their employ.

HAMID

Pisa? We're already contracted to fight for Florence, against them.

WERNER

Hamid, we're a *Free Company*, remember? That means we're *free* to do whatever we want, for whoever we want, for as much money as we want. This is going to be a very successful campaign...

A commotion outside and some cheers -- Werner turns to see Janick pulling up outside the tent driving a supply cart.

EXT. COMMAND TENT - CONTINUOUS

Werner comes out, eyeing the cart full of produce stolen from local farms. Janick's men wrangle sheep and goods; service teams start unloading.

JANICK

Damn fertile land, I say. We
almost got too much, might make
the men fat. I'm looking at you,
Bec.

BEC is a female knight in spiked armor, built like a UFC champ, sitting nearby -- she gives him the finger.

BEC

See this? Fatter than thine.

[Note: Yes, there should be female knights in the ranks. We're not going for strict, staid historical accuracy. Intentional anachronisms will be mentioned throughout.]

WERNER

Any trouble?

JANICK

No. Just peasants, they mostly got
out of our way... Mostly. Good
vineyards too -- here try this.

He starts to grab a flagon of wine, but Werner spots a SHEATHED LONGSWORD lying across the driver's bench with other goods.

Werner bats aside the flagon...

He picks up the sword... At first glance it doesn't seem anything special... Worn, dark leather grips around the first half of the tang...

But the metalwork in the handle and pommel is strong, elegant... if a little dirty...

Werner seems to recognize it, with some unease. He gently draws back the roughed up, dull leather scabbard...

Inside, the highest quality blade gleams, engraved with Ogham (ancient Celtic) runic script along its center fuller channel.

This is no ordinary longsword.

It's a lethal, almost mythic masterpiece (think Anduril from *Lord of the Rings*).

JANICK
 Jesus... Didn't seem like much on
 the outside, didn't even check.

WERNER
 Where did you get this?

JANICK
 Some peasants had it in their
 haystack, must've stolen it. Let's
 just say justice was served.

Werner is troubled, confused. It doesn't make sense.

JANICK
 What? What is it?

Thunder rumbles. The rain starts to increase. Hamid arrives.

HAMID
 Sir? Volterra's back.

For a moment more, Werner eyes the sword... He sheathes it and
 stuffs it into Janick's arms.

WERNER
 Come with me.

EXT. THE WALLS OF VOLTERRA - MOMENTS LATER

A LARGE CHEST is thrown open -- full of gold pieces and wares.
 Werner and his entourage eye it, as Volterra waits nervously.
 Werner glances at Hamid, assessing the amount. Hamid nods.

LORD VOLTERRA
 It is what you asked.

Werner nods, but the increasing rain CLINKS on the gold. He
 looks up at the sky, at all of them getting soaked.

He turns to look at the closed town gates, a few men on guard
 on the wall above... He looks to Janick, holding THE SWORD...

WERNER
 I thank you, Lord Volterra, for
 gathering all this for us with
 such efficiency. You've made a
 wise decision. But this rain... I
 don't like the rain. So I'm afraid
 I've changed my mind. I think I'll
 take the gold and your town.

Lord Volterra blanches, opening his mouth to protest --

Janick draws the sword and severs Volterra's head. Immediately, Bec and Werner's other knights slaughter Volterra's escorts with ruthless ease.

Meanwhile, Werner walks a little way toward the town gate, eyeing the guards above it...

They disappear from view.

Werner keeps watching, steely-eyed.

A few moments... Then the gates start to slowly open.

WERNER

Good dogs.

His knights thunder past him, heading to take the town, while Werner turns back to Janick, who's wiping blood from the sword.

JANICK

This is good steel...

WERNER

Who else did you see? Anyone at all?

JANICK

What? No one, just peasants, farmers. Oh there was this shepherd, burly chap who had a little mettle about him, so we taught him some respect.

This gives Werner pause.

WERNER

You didn't kill him?

JANICK

He was a castaway. I felt charitable; I'd wager he'll turn up at camp, looking for work.

WERNER

No. Send men back, right now. Find him and kill him, and anyone else you left alive.

JANICK

Why? He was just a shepherd.

But Werner mounts up to head into town.

WERNER

I gave you an order, Janick!

EXT. CROSSROADS TAVERN - DAY

At a crossroads in a Tuscan valley sits a TAVERN INN. Rain turns the dusty tracks to muck...

Oliver rides Sola the donkey up to the tavern. A couple of drinkers outside eye him, a little shocked...

INT. CROSSROADS TAVERN - MOMENTS LATER

The door swings open... Oliver walks in, dripping wet, and the place goes quiet, staring at his blood-stained shepherd rags.

It's a dank drinking hall and inn, catering to local farmers and travelers alike. Cracked wood beams, a roaring hearth fire.

Peasant laborers, a few ladies of the night. Some farmers look like they've been beaten up too... A traumatized community, in mourning... They watch Oliver pass on his way to the bar...

Oliver sets his crook against it. The BARKEEP eyes him.

BARKEEP

Ale?

Oliver nods. Barkeep pours a mug.

Oliver drinks, feeling the eyes on him. Not caring. Thirsty, he finishes the pint, sets it down.

BARKEEP

You were Gio's man. They came through his 'stead too?

Oliver nods.

BARKEEP

Is he...?

OLIVER

They're dead. All of them.

Survivors drop their gaze, sorry.

Barkeep refills Oliver's ale.

OLIVER

I'm looking for them. I'm looking The Red Company.

A stunned hush in the air...

OLIVER

Anybody know where they went?

Silence.

But then they hear A COMMOTION OUTSIDE, shouts, horses...

Unlike the others, Oliver doesn't turn to look as:

The door bursts open...

In come A DOZEN TOUGH MEN-AT-ARMS from The Red Company. These aren't high-born knights, they're just grunts. Swords are expensive -- this class carries picks, flails, daggers, spears.

Their leader is a big bastard named EADWULF. He looks around the room, spotting a few beat-up farmers.

EADWULF

We're looking for a shepherd.

One of them nervously glances at Oliver. Eadwulf follows his gaze, spotting him drinking.

EADWULF

Oi! Shepherd!

OLIVER

My name is Oliver.

Eadwulf approaches, while his men fan out behind him, drawing their weapons.

Eadwulf sidles up next to Oliver, close, sneering at him.

Oliver doesn't turn. The local peasants watch in horror...

EADWULF

I said... Oi--

He's not able to finish... Oliver SMASHES THE MUG into his face, then stabs the remaining shard into Eadwulf's fat neck --

BAM! He kicks Eadwulf's knee, shattering it -- SLAMS his head into the counter, then spins him around in a headlock.

Oliver glares at the shocked men-at-arms, holding their leader hostage, gushing blood, gurgling. He pauses for effect... then he breaks Eadwulf's neck.

The big fella hits the floor.

The whole room stares. All of us realizing at once:

This is no ordinary peasant.

Oliver picks up his crook, eyeing them all... He flips it over, hook-side down in a practiced martial stance... Come at me.

The Reds roar and charge him!

Oliver moves with lightning speed and vicious expertise.

He hooks one's arm before he can strike -- spinning to leverage the crook -- snapping bones -- the Red squeals --

He hits fast with both ends like a bo staff, deflecting and moving, rolling across a table --

He kicks the table up into one's face, then ducks under to yank his legs out, dropping his head onto the table edge. He spins and strikes the next Red in the neck, flipping him over--

They come at him from all sides --

One Red's flail catches his crook -- Oliver ducks a blow that then breaks it in half --

Another Red body-checks Oliver, smashing him across another table, scattering glass and peasants...

Oliver is no superhero. He's human, he takes big hits, he hurts... but he always gets back up again.

He snatches an iron candelbra and stuffs the candles into the Red's face, burning, catching his hair on fire -- then he's up and swings it like a bat -- the Red crumples.

More coming at Oliver fast...

One swings a HEAVY MACE, smashing chunks out of walls and furniture as Oliver barely evades --

Oliver grabs a wooden chair, flipping it round, legs out --

He traps the mace, twisting to break the arm that wields it, spinning, fighting with the chair like it was made for combat.

He bludgeons a nose here, hooks a neck there, drags a Red into the path of his partner's incoming WAR HAMMER blow --

Teeth fly, blood spatters.

Oliver is whipped with a flail that slices up his back --

He charges another Red, tackling him into the hearth fire, scattering embers. Oliver grabs a burning log and batters the Red's face, knocking him out.

Then Oliver takes the Red's ARMOR PICK, rising... It's a single-handed hammer weapon with a raptor-claw SPIKE...

The last six Reds come at him.

Like lambs to the slaughter.

Oliver ducks and parries, striking hard and fast --

He's not just brawling. He fights with skill, with style.

This is a MARTIAL ART...

This is HEMA (Historical European Martial Arts).

Yes, like Japan or China of the same period, Medieval Europe had its own martial arts, with various techniques and styles. Today people are relearning them thanks in part to rediscovered ancient texts. Point is: a European knight could be as precise, disciplined, fast and intentional as any samurai. This is an opportunity to show people A NEW STYLE OF COMBAT ONSCREEN.

Oliver blocks and strikes, getting in close, spiking down into gaps in chainmail, up into groin and pit, taking a dagger too.

Hammer in one hand, dagger in the other, Oliver cuts into the last remaining men-at-arms with brutal precision.

One by one, bodies hit the floor.

At last, it falls quiet.

The local peasants, cowering in the corners of the room, can only stare at Oliver as he catches his breath in the center.

There's ONE LAST RED COMPANY MAN, still standing, arm broken.

OLIVER

The knight who led your raiding party. What is his name?

RED SURVIVOR

...Janick. He's Janick.

The man turns and runs out the door.

Oliver is remarkably calm. He looks around at the bodies. He leans down to one, pulling off the dead man's doublet jacket...

He winces, feeling the gashes in his back. His eyes meet a local busty BAWD standing nearby.

OLIVER

Spirits?

She nods, goes to the Barkeep who hands her a bottle.

Oliver stands and tears off his own tattered shirt...

The Bawd stares, wide-eyed, at his chiseled, scarred torso.

OLIVER
Pour it on, please.

She pours the spirit onto his flail wounds, dabbing with cloth. She keeps going, coming round to his front too, not wanting to stop ogling him, copping a little feel of his pecs --

OLIVER
I think that's enough, thank you.

BAWD
Right, yes, sorry.
(gawking)
Anything else you need?

Oliver pulls on the dead man's dark shirt and jacket, replacing his tattered shepherd cloth.

OLIVER
I was saying... I'm looking for
The Red Company.

Silence.

BAWD
I think you found them.

BARKEEP
You would pick a fight with them?
With the whole Company? Why?

Oliver considers this, cold.

OLIVER
They killed my friends. They took
something from me. And because...
I can.

GRIZZLED FARMER
They're at Volterra. That's what I
heard.

OLIVER
It's walled?

GRIZZLED FARMER
High-walled.

OLIVER
Is there any other way into the
town, other than the gates?

After a moment, the Bawd speaks up, sheepish.

BAWD

There is a secret way. I knew a girl. Lord Volterra smuggled a good time into his town sometimes, if you know what I mean... But the only ones who know the way in... They're not of this world. Go through the south woods...

BARKEEP

Elsie, no... No one in their right mind goes there anymore.

BAWD

He said he wants a way. Go there, they'll find you. And honey? Make sure you go prepared.

She picks up a flanged mace and holds it out to him.

EXT. VOLTERRA TOWN - ESTABLISHING - NIGHT

Volterra is being pillaged by The Red Company's advance force. Soldiers ransack homes, taking whatever valuables they find.

At the highest point of town sits a SMALL PROVINCIAL CASTLE...

INT. LORD'S QUARTERS - VOLTERRA KEEP - NIGHT

Werner Von Urslingen sits at Lord Volterra's desk in his private quarters, fire burning, eating with a few of his knights, including Hamid, Bec and Janick.

JANICK

I say we stay here a while. Good-looking, these Tuscans. Might as well have a little fun, right Bec?

BEC

Can't hurt.

JANICK

What do you say, boss?

Werner is pensive, by a stack of books, flipping through one, then another, as if looking for something...

He pauses, finding what he's looking for. On the table nearby is THE LONGSWORD.

Werner looks back and forth from the longsword's engraved blade, to an OGHAM SCRIPT CIPHER in the book...

JANICK

What are you doing? What are you looking at?

WERNER

The Auraicept na n-Éces (gaelic).

JANICK

The what?

The doors open. The soldier with the broken arm, from the tavern, is led in, battered and bleeding.

JANICK

What on Earth happened to you?

BROKEN SOLDIER

The shepherd... We found him. He killed them. All of them, all our men. He wasn't even armed. I barely got away.

Werner gives a nod to his knights, who drag the soldier out, closing the doors. For a few moments, Werner looks at the book.

JANICK

Bloody hell. Rather impressive. What kind of shepherd can do that?

Werner stands and picks up THE LONGSWORD. He flashes its blade at them, showing the runic script.

WERNER

This is Ogham script. Old Celtic tree runes. You know what it says?

Of course they don't.

WERNER

It says "My name is Poet. My voice sings for justice, equity, and honor."

JANICK

The sword's name is Poet?

BAM! Werner punches Janick with its hilt -- he drops the ground and Werner stabs the sword into the floor, inches from him, leaving it swaying.

JANICK

What the fuck?!

WERNER

This is the sword of a Paladin.

JANICK
Bullshit, they're a myth.

WERNER
No, they're not.

He glances at Hamid and others, who don't know what it means.

WERNER
Since the times of Charlemagne,
there can only ever be twelve of
them. They are knights-errant,
wanderers, a Secret Order
dedicated to martial excellence
and a code of chivalry. They
cannot be bought, they cannot be
bargained with. The only way you
can come by their service is if
you save their life... then they
are honor-bound to you.

JANICK
He can't be a Paladin. He was a
nobody... I know when someone's
born of the dirt.

WERNER
And yet there are tales of the one
they called "The Peasant". I heard
he squired to a great English
knight, who trained him, initiated
him into the Order. But when the
knight died suddenly in his sleep,
the peasant boy was ousted and
left for dead by the knight's son
and heir. Wounded and dying, his
life was saved by a passing
Cardinal, Jacques Di Montero...

A shudder of recognition goes through the knights.

BEC
Pope John the Twenty-Second... The
Pope?!

EXT. CROSSROADS TAVERN - NIGHT

We see Oliver dragging bodies of the dead Reds out of the
tavern.

Stripping them of armor and weapons.

WERNER (V.O.)

The owner of this sword was the Pope's Paladin, honor-bound to his service. Some called him The Black Death... They say he has killed more than the plague, fighting the Cardinal's battles, assassinating his enemies. To be released from the then-Cardinal's service at last, he cleared the way for his master's ascension to Pope. And then... he disappeared.

We see Oliver, standing beside a bonfire of burning human corpses. He stares into the flames with furious determination.

INT. LORD'S QUARTERS - VOLTERRA KEEP - NIGHT

HAMID

This is the man who killed Lockwood? And his entire inner circle? They called it the Night of the Crimson Flood... So much blood ran in the gutters.

WERNER

Our own Company rose to fill the void left by the work of Poet here and its master.

INT. DARK ROAD - NIGHT

Oliver walks in the dark countryside, heading for black woods.

WERNER (V.O.)

It is said that upon a Paladin's confirmation, his soul leaves his body and from then on it resides within his sword...

INT. LORD'S QUARTERS - VOLTERRA KEEP - CONTINUOUS

WERNER (CONT'D)

A sword like that, which you have stolen from him. He will be coming for it.

Janick gets up, grabbing the sword. Scoffing.

JANICK

A peasant with a fine sword is still just a peasant!

WERNER

I suggest you try to give it back.

JANICK

Bollocks to that! This is a work of art, it belongs to someone who appreciates quality, not someone who leaves it hidden in a haystack. I'm not going to sit here worrying about one filthy plebeian. We just took a new town! Celebrations are in order!

He turns to a couple of his buddies.

JANICK

Let's go, now!

They head out. Werner sits, staring into the fireplace...

EXT. DARK WOODS - NIGHT

Oliver walks a track in a dark forest. A slope rises on one side of it. Sola the Donkey pulls a small cart, its cargo covered with a burlap tarp.

He carries a torch, but its flickering light is swallowed by shadows that pool and creep beneath the trees.

Branches creak and groan in the wind.

Oliver suddenly hears SNAPPING TWIGS AND FOOTSTEPS RUNNING through the trees.

He turns, raising his torch... But he can't see anything in the black beyond.

Now FOOTSTEPS ON THE OTHER SIDE, rushing past -- he turns...

We glimpse a shadow under the trees, watching him with eerie stillness, before it steps out of sight...

Sola gives a nervous whinny. Oliver gives her a calm touch.

OLIVER

Easy, girl.

He glances into the cart, reaching to pull out a dagger...

As he does, another silhouette flits between trees behind him.

HISSES and ANIMAL RASPING in the dark...

Hear more scampering. Multiple creatures. Closing in.

OLIVER

I seek counsel. Show yourselves!

He peers into the dark, holding his torch up...

He turns and --

A HIDEOUS DEMON IS RIGHT IN FRONT OF HIM! Like something out of a Giotto or Van Eyck painting of hell --

It shoves him backward, he trips over a tree root --

He falls into the MOUTH OF A CAVE!

INT. OUTER CAVE - MOMENTS LATER

Oliver tumbles down a rocky slope, landing in a small cavern.

He grabs his dagger and torch, still lit, and turns to face the way he came...

He waits, expecting them to come down after him...

Behind him... TWO GANGLLED CREATURES emerge from other passages.

He starts to climb back up the slope to the woods when --

He's grabbed and yanked down! He drops his torch, our only source of light as --

TWO DEMONS attack him! Skinny and pale, hideous demonic faces! They SHRIEK as #1 swings a short sword, #2 a flail --

Oliver barely ducks and evades in time, it's hard to see in the sputtering torchlight --

He blocks and traps the sword-demon's arm, kicking its body across the room --

Demon #2 lets out a high-pitched, female YELL, rushing at him, whipping the flail which clangs against rock walls --

Demon #1 snatches his feet, tackling him against the wall --

CLANG! The sword sparks against the rock, inches from his face!

He blocks and strikes again, disarming the sword but Demon #2's flail catches his hand -- his dagger flies into the dark!

Demon #1 pounces onto his back, clawing, strangling --

He spins, evading Demon #2's flail and --

HE SLAMS Demon #1 backward into the wall -- A SCREAM and she falls off, scrambling to the sword again --

Oliver barely has time to recover as they come at him again, but now the torch is between him and them, revealing...

They're TWO WOMEN, barely clothed in scant rags, wearing homemade, hideous DEMON MASKS...

OLIVER

Wait!

But they strike to kill --

He fights back in vicious, spooky, close-quarters combat.

He blocks and hits back with professional skill, hurling one against the wall, hard --

He spots his dagger on the floor nearby --

He rolls under the swipe of the other's sword, snatches it, coming up again --

He disarms Demon #2, twists her arm back, yanking her around in front of him as Demon #1 comes swinging --

OLIVER

STOP!

Demon #1 halts, because he has Demon #2, knife at her neck...

Three of them, chests heaving, sweat running down bare skin.

He rips off Demon #2's mask to reveal a young woman (20s) -- a twisted little firecracker named PIETA, hissing at him.

OLIVER

(to Demon #1)

Take it off.

The other removes her mask too. Older but sinewy, cold-blooded by necessity, like a mangy lioness -- MONICA (50s).

OLIVER

I have no quarrel with you,
demons.

Suddenly, Pieta's whole demeanor gear-shifts:

She arches against him, gazing up seductively... She lets her ragged shirt fall further open, exposing a naked breast --

PIETA

Oh the quarrel is all gone out of
me, my lord... How I've waited for
a knight that can best me...

Oliver's attention is taken for just a second -- he quickly covers up her modesty again but when he looks up --

Monica has taken her chance, CHARGING!

OLIVER

No!

She slams him into the wall, pinning his dagger-hand --

Pieta gets free, runs for the short sword -- then she's coming back, ready to kill him! She swings the sword!

At the last second, Oliver twists free, yanking Monica down with him, they take out Pieta's legs, tripping her over them --

Oliver pins Monica down with a leg-lock around her neck as Pieta leaps on top of him, shrieking!

He catches her sword inches from his neck, struggling to hold its point back as she leans her weight down on it --

The blade tip inches toward his neck... Monica is choking...

With a final effort, he deflects it aside -- grabs Pieta's hair, slamming her forehead into the ground beside him --

He twists and grabs Pieta in a headlock, Monica still held in his leg-lock.

OLIVER

I said stop!

The three of them pause again, gasping, bodies entwined together on the floor like fighting snakes.

OLIVER

I need a way into Volterra. In exchange for your help, I won't break your necks... And... I'll give you the offering I brought for you. It's in my cart.

Pieta's eyes meet Monica's. He has bested them.

INT. DEMON CAVE HIDEOUT - NIGHT

Oliver heaves the burlap bundle that was in his cart. It clinks as he drags it after Pieta, stooping through an opening:

They arrive in the DEMON HIDEOUT, a small home within the cave system. Monica is there, with candles and a cooking fire going.

Oliver takes in the scene: around the walls are KNIGHTS' ARMOR AND WEAPONS, stashed and sorted by category. It's hot and humid like a sauna. He peels off his jacket. Three people, sticky.

Oliver opens the sack and dumps out his offering: chainmail, pieces of armor and weapons taken from the tavern Reds.

Pieta and Monica eye it, a little impressed.

MONICA
You got all these yourself?

OLIVER
Just for you.

Pieta sidles close, sizing him up.

PIETA
Killer.

OLIVER
Thief.

She smirks; playful, dangerous.

MONICA
Take a seat then, have some
bellytimber.

PIETA
Want me to look at your wounds? I
could kiss 'em better for you.

OLIVER
You trap knights down here? From
all sides it seems...

MONICA
All sides take from women like
us...

PIETA
Take everything they see.

MONICA
With all the wars going on,
wayward soldiers cut through the
forest. Stragglers, runaways. So
we take from them first.

OLIVER
You kill them first, you take from
them second.

MONICA
If you're going to get particular,
we terrify them first.

Pieta holds a demon mask to her face, dancing close to Oliver before slowly lowering it, her face close.

PIETA
People are cheap. Armor's
expensive. Goes for a good price
on the hidden market. Keeps us fed
and watered.

OLIVER
And yet you live in a cave.

MONICA
Where nobody bothers us.

PIETA
Where we can do whatever we like.
Free to frolic to and fro.

She twirls away but her eyes stay on him, suggestive.

MONICA
Why do you want to sneak into
Volterra?

OLIVER
I have business with The Red
Company.

MONICA
What kind of business?

OLIVER
Your kind of business.

Pieta brings him a cup of stew. He eyes it, suspicious.

MONICA
Why?

OLIVER
They took from me.

Pieta lifts his cup to her own lips, taking a sip to show it's not poisoned. She licks her lips slowly, giving it back.

MONICA
What did they take?

Oliver goes quiet a moment.

OLIVER
Peace. And people.

MONICA

People don't come back once
they're gone, and I don't think
you're looking to find the other,
are you?

He takes a sip of the stew, looking at Monica over the fire.

MONICA (CONT'D)

Nay, nay... oh there's a fury in
you. A raging hate. You want to
hurt people. Or you want to hurt
yourself. Maybe both.

OLIVER

Maybe so.

MONICA

He's honest about his intentions,
though his intentions be
dishonest...

PIETA

A very unusual knight.

OLIVER

I am no knight.

PIETA

What are you then?

Oliver retreats into himself, considering it. The two women
watch him like hawks in the flickering dark.

OLIVER

Someone who's had enough of small
men with big titles taking and
taking whatever they want, more
than anyone could need, and
calling it noble business.

Pieta pulls at her open neckline, slinking closer.

PIETA

Oh my... Is it just me or is it
getting even hotter in here? A
vicious savior? An avenging angel?
Oh I like this one, Monica.
Prithee, can I keep him?

MONICA

What would your husband think?

PIETA
 (snaps)
 Your son is long-dead by battle
 and you know it!

Monica glances away, steely. Pieta caresses Oliver's arm.

PIETA
 (whisper)
 He was a lousy sort anyway. Stay,
 relax with me a while, we can go
 to town tomorrow.

OLIVER
 My lady, your hospitality has
 been... remarkable. But I must
 reach Volterra by cover of night.
 Will you help me or not?

A little disappointed, Pieta turns to Monica.

PIETA
 The way is still open, is it not?

MONICA
 Last I checked.

PIETA
 If we get you inside the walls,
 will there be dead knights to
 plunder?

OLIVER
 On that, I give you my word.

Pieta and Monica smile.

EXT. MARKET SQUARE - VOLTERRA - NIGHT

The town's close-packed, wood-beam two-story houses give way to a SMALL OPEN SQUARE, usually used for markets and gatherings.

Janick and his ENTOURAGE OF KNIGHTS (both male and female) climb up a scaffold above a crowd of YOUNG LOCALS. Janick swigs a bottle, the sword called POET hooked across his back.

JANICK
 Everybody, heed my voice!

The young local peasants are nervous, Red men-at-arms all around. But these Red Company KNIGHTS are undeniably...COOL. Rockstars of a warrior society. They're rich, fashionable; armor and weapons all expressions of their personal style.

JANICK

You think us invaders, I know.
It's true, we cut down some of
your people, those that resisted,
we had to. But that's all over
now. Frankly, your Lord Volterra
was old and rather useless.
Companies like us, we're the
future, and sometimes we have to
break a few things, a few people,
to make way for it. Look at us.
We're free. We're rich. And I tell
you we look after our own...

(beat)

So you have a choice to make. You
can remain bitter that we took
your town, or you can join the fun
and see what's next.

He signals a Red Company BAND, who start banging makeshift
DRUMS, salvaged pieces of armor, any kind of gear. A TECHNO
PERCUSSION BANGER ramps up while Janick's men tap ALE KEGS and
offer them to bewildered locals... *This is a recruitment drive.*

JANICK

Time for a proper bop I say.

The Reds cheer, starting to drink and dance, lighting bonfires,
and the young locals find themselves swept up by the energy.

EXT. SEWER ALLEY - VOLTERRA - NIGHT

A deserted alleyway. Bodies of local soldiers in the gutters.
Medieval towns are ramshackle fire-hazard labyrinths, but this
one has Roman foundations, which means actual sewers...

A grate shifts aside. Pieta crawls out, crouched, wearing her
demon mask. Oliver follows, with Monica last.

Pieta lifts her mask to glance at some of the bodies.

MONICA

Well, sir, here be more dead
people to fuel your fire. Will you
selflessly avenge them too?

The cold determination in him does seem to be building...

But they hear POUNDING DRUMS echoing somewhere off in the city.

PIETA

Oooo, is it a fete? I do love a
good reel and riot.

OLIVER
I must go alone from here.

MONICA
Oh we're not here to help you.

Monica hands him a KITE SHIELD (upside-down tear-drop shape, broad on top, narrowing to a point below). He looks at it.

OLIVER
My blade?

MONICA
What blade? Blades fetch a good price, I would've noticed if you had one. No, you had no armor neither -- just a shield.

Pieta kisses his cheek, then pulls her demon mask down again.

PIETA
We'll be watching.

Oliver slings the shield onto his back and sets off into the dark. When he glances back, they're gone.

EXT. MARKET SQUARE - VOLTERRA - NIGHT

Janick's MEDIEVAL RAVE RAGES. Thumping drums. Fire breathers.

The Band play TECHNO on medieval or makeshift instruments (e.g. see: @After_Cooking on youtube). Yeah it's anachronistic but it's a fucking vibe: a party modern kids want to go to -- it's cool and sexy.

Someone sprays oil at a bonfire, the flames burst higher. An apothecary hands out mushrooms, clothes are coming off.

Groupies drape around Janick.

Bec makes out with a buff peasant dude.

Local peasants succumb to the excitement. The Knights are star athletes, and they'll be getting laid at this party --

We're starting to recognize various individual knights, though here they wear little if any armor or mail, just fine apparel.

EXT. ALLEY BY SQUARE - SAME TIME

From one of the many alleys branching off this open area, Oliver emerges from the shadows, looking in.

The crowd are just silhouettes around bonfires.

But then he sees Janick up on a scaffold...wearing his sword.

In Oliver's mind, IMAGES FLASH: *Janick leering over him, the farm in flames, Luca's dead body.* His rage starts rising...

EXT. SECURITY CHECKPOINT - MOMENTS LATER

TWO RED MEN-AT-ARMS run security. Oliver arrives.

SECURITY GUARD
What ya think you're doing here?

OLIVER
I have business with him.

Oliver points across the party at Janick.

SECURITY GUARD
With Janick? What kind of business?

OLIVER
I'm going to kill him.

A beat. The guards start laughing. Oliver smiles.

SECURITY GUARD
A good jest! You had me!

BAM! Oliver rams the shield up into Guard 1's jaw, then smashes its point backward to break Guard 2's sternum --

Guard 1 tries to draw his sword -- Oliver punches the shield forward and back between the two guards, taking them down.

SHORT SEQUENCE:

As the rave continues: Oliver cuts like a wraith around the edges of the party.

He strikes from the shadows like a ninja, taking out guards one by one, with brutal efficiency.

The people dance and heave, sweaty and scandalous.

Oliver keeps moving, a shadow flitting past the edges of the crowd. Dancing Red soldiers are suddenly yanked beneath the crowd, vanishing like swimmers taken by an unseen shark.

He hammers his shield into a guard. He slams a knight's head into a wall, knocking him out. Whittling down their numbers.

EXT. MARKET SQUARE - VOLTERRA - NIGHT

Oliver crashes into a trio of soldiers, but one strikes him in the leg -- he falls beneath them --

He trips one's legs then rolls on top of him shield-down, pinning the guard down with his weight while --

He grabs the guard's axe, slices the achilles of another then hurls the axe into the skull of the third. He rolls up and smashes the shield down to knock out the two on the ground.

But he turns, finding nearby dancers and a couple KNIGHTS staring at him in disbelief...

BURLY KNIGHT

My weapon! Get me a weapon!

Oliver bolts toward a GALLOWS SCAFFOLD nearby, barely evading weapon-swipes of the new incoming assailants.

EXT. GALLOWS SCAFFOLD - PARTY - CONTINUOUS

Oliver climbs to the top of the scaffold where dancers gyrate.

EXT. BAND SCAFFOLD - PARTY - SAME TIME

Janick spots a commotion across the party. He drops his lady and turns, seeing Oliver atop the scaffold, staring at him.

JANICK

Well well. This is getting fun.

(shouting out)

Bring that filth to me!

BURLY KNIGHT (M) and DOUBLE DAGGERS KNIGHT (F) lead soldiers, climbing up to reach the top of Oliver's scaffold...

EXT. GALLOWS SCAFFOLD - PARTY - SAME TIME

Oliver attacks fast and hard with his kite shield.

He blocks and traps a soldier's leg with the curve of the shield, snapping bones and spinning into the next one --

Oliver upends him with the shield, hurling him down into dancers, sending them all falling from the scaffold --

EXT. DANCE FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

Revelers below look up as soldiers fall dead at their feet --

Some catch a dancer girl, crowd-surfing her to cheers.

EXT. GALLOWS SCAFFOLD - PARTY - SAME TIME

Burly Knight and Double Daggers attack, him swinging a shestopyor (heavy flanged mace), her darting with fast blades.

Oliver ducks the mace, swinging the shield onto his back to deflect daggers from behind as he kicks in Burly's knee --

The big guy goes down a notch and Oliver spins, pulling the shield overhead again to deflect blows from the blades.

He rams the shield edge-first into Daggers's gut, then point-down into Burly's foot, breaking toes, pinning it --

He springs upward, leveraging the shield up into Burly's head, knocking him down, then quickly flipping the shield around as Daggers strikes --

He catches her arm in one of the cross-straps, inside the shield, then twists and breaks it -- catching the dagger she drops and stabbing it into her neck.

EXT. BAND SCAFFOLD - PARTY - SAME TIME

As Janick watches Oliver dismantle his knights, his mood shifts... CREEPING FEAR EMERGING.

JANICK

Get rid of him! I want his head!

Janick jumps down into the crowd to make his escape.

EXT. GALLOWS SCAFFOLD - PARTY - SAME TIME

Oliver sees his prey making a run for it --

WHAM! Burly Knight swings his mace -- it hits Oliver's shield like a freight train, knocking him off the top of the scaffold!

Oliver flails and falls shield-first but --

EXT. DANCE FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

The crowd catches him, surfing him above them a moment.

But CROSSBOWMEN arrive beside Burly and SHOOT DOWN AT HIM!

Oliver flips over and down -- one bolt lodges in his shield, another explodes the skull of a dancer beside him!

The crowd screams. Panic sets in.

Oliver ducks between them, rushing through the pandemonium.

Up ahead, Janick is caught in it too, shoved this way and that.

Oliver uses the shield like a train's cowcatcher to plow forward through the crowd...

Janick sees him closing in --

JANICK
Stop him! Stop him!!

TWO SOLDIERS move to stop Oliver but --

He bulldozes one, grabbing him in a headlock -- SNAP!

He deflects the other's sword blow with the shield, again and again, until the soldier rears for a heavy hit --

Oliver smashes into his ribs, catching the sword and flipping it around to impale the soldier's thigh into the floor, leaving him stuck and screaming...

Janick is horrified, afraid... He reaches behind his back and draws OLIVER'S SWORD -- POET. It shines in the firelight.

OLIVER
That's mine.

JANICK
Oh fuck off, peasant! Come on,
come and get it then!

Oliver starts forward, but sees CROSSBOWMEN in Poet's reflection, taking aim at his back...!

Oliver ducks, swinging the shield around --

THUD-THUD-THUD! Bolts slam into the shield...

Then Janick is roaring at him!

Oliver rolls backward as his own sword swipes down where he was, sparks flying off the cobbles --

Janick is ferocious, swinging fast and skillfully.

Oliver ducks and evades for a moment, but then he raises his shield to block --

Poet slices the top section of the shield CLEAN OFF!

A beat.

Oliver is in trouble. Janick is amazed...*this is some sword.*

He attacks again.

Oliver backs away, parrying but his kite shield is HACKED APART into smaller and smaller pieces --

He hurls the last piece of shield at Janick's face then --

TACKLES HIM BACKWARD against a wall!

Janick drops the sword with a clang.

They fight hand to hand. Janick is no slouch -- he's been a warrior since birth. He strikes back, knocking Oliver down.

They pummel each other with the skill of kung fu masters, but this European art feels thunderous -- grappling and deflecting, throwing elbows and knees --

Oliver beats Janick down to his knees, stunning him --

Oliver scrambles for his sword --

Janick rolls away -- the TWANG of crossbows!

A bolt hits Oliver's torso, impaling him into the wall!

He struggles to reach Poet, but it's an inch out of reach...

Janick, battered and dazed, just grabs Poet and RUNS.

Oliver sees two crossbowmen reload, the third running at him --

He strains and rips the bolt out of the wall JUST IN TIME --

He stabs it into the attacking crossbowman's head, then grabs him as a human shield to absorb two more incoming bolts.

EXT. MAZE OF NARROW ALLEYS - MOMENTS LATER

Janick runs for his life, bruised and beaten.

Oliver chases after him, bleeding from his side.

The streets are narrow and winding. Janick topples barrels, leaps over chickens in the dark --

Oliver nimbly vaults obstacles, gaining on him.

Janick turns out of sight --

Oliver bolts past onlookers, snatching a bottle as he goes --

EXT. CATHEDRAL - CONTINUOUS

Janick rushes into a slightly wider street where, across the way, we see the town's SMALL CATHEDRAL. It's not much bigger than a church, but it's well built of stone.

Thinking he's lost Oliver, Janick starts uphill --

BAM! Oliver comes from the side, tackling him down.

The sword flies out of reach again.

Oliver punches Janick down, smashes the bottle he's carrying against the floor and stabs its jagged edge at Janick's neck...

Janick catches his hand, straining to keep it away...

Oliver has the upper hand. One more shove and Janick dies...

WHAM! Oliver is knocked down by A KNIGHT ON HORSEBACK.

Winded, he crawls away as the knight dismounts, flanked by other knights -- these ones in chainmail and light armor.

These guys have not been partying; they're Werner's men. DORIAN is Werner's personal guard -- a hulking demon of a man.

DORIAN

Janick, do I really have to clean
up your mess again?

Janick spits blood, seething. He grabs Poet again.

JANICK

Just kill him already.

Dorian heads for Oliver while the others look on.

Oliver bravely gets to his feet, exhausted...

He tries to counter but Dorian has IRON GAUNTLETS.

WHAM! He beats Oliver down, then hurls him across the road.

Oliver tumbles, broken and exhausted. He's in deep shit...

Dorian stomps toward him to finish the job...

AN ARROW WHISTLES in the night. One of Dorian's knights falls, gurgling blood, an arrow in his neck.

WHISTLE-SNAP. WHISTLE-SNAP. Two more go down from arrows expertly shot into chinks in their armor.

KNIGHT
Archer! Up there!

Dorian draws his sword, looking up --

A HOODED ARCHER snipes from a rooftop beside the church. The next arrow comes straight at Dorian!

He deflects with his gauntlet, clanging it aside.

DORIAN
Go! Bring me that one too!

Just then, the Church door opens. Through blurry eyes, Oliver sees a PRIEST in the doorway, looking across at him.

As the arrows keep coming, and the knights focus on defense, Oliver takes his chance...

He gets up and runs.

DORIAN (O.S.)
No!

Oliver staggers for the Church doors. Dorian pounds after him, gaining fast. He's about to grab him when --

Oliver falls through the cathedral door.

OLIVER
Sanctuary!

FATHER ANTONIO
Stop!

The priest bravely steps over Oliver's body, halting Dorian.

FATHER ANTONIO
This man has called for sanctuary,
and so it is granted.

DORIAN
He's mine!

FATHER ANTONIO
He is god's, as are we all. You
know the rules, good knight. No
blood may be spilled on holy
ground.

FATHER ANTONIO's best years are behind him, but he's steeled and speaks with fearless authority and a little wry defiance.

Dorian sneers, but even this beast of a knight knows not to try and fight this fight...

FATHER ANTONIO

You're welcome to come in for a civil parley, if you remove all of your arms and armor first.

DORIAN

Let him hide in his rat-hole. He's got nowhere to go.

Dorian turns and leaves, signaling his men.

DORIAN

Station men! Watch all the exits!

Father Antonio peers down at Oliver, lying broken at his feet.

FATHER ANTONIO

Hello, Oliver. I've been looking for you.

INT. CATHEDRAL - NIGHT

Clutching his bleeding side, Oliver limps after Father Antonio.

The cathedral is small and bare-walled by later standards. Lit by candles and a few campfires; smoke rises past high pillars, slowly venting from windows at the top of the vaulted ceiling.

It's become a little REFUGEE CAMP AND HOSPITAL; injured or threatened Volterrans hiding from The Red Company.

The local DEACON GIALLO hurries to them, worried --

DEACON GIALLO

Bishop Antonio... They're stationing outside the Eastern door too, and the crypt!

FATHER ANTONIO

It's alright, my son. They won't come in. Just make sure no one goes out tonight, no matter what.

DEACON GIALLO

Of course.

FATHER ANTONIO

Could you bring some stew, and some of that tea I showed you.

DEACON GIALLO

Yes, Father.

Antonio leads Oliver to a small fire, away from others.

FATHER ANTONIO
Here, take a seat.

OLIVER
You're a Bishop now?

FATHER ANTONIO
Do I look the part?

Antonio wears simple, unassuming clothes.

OLIVER
You look old.

FATHER ANTONIO
And you look broken. Are you going
to die from that?

Oliver winces, blood seeps through his fingers at his wound.

OLIVER
I'm going to try not to.

FATHER ANTONIO
Good.

OLIVER
What are you doing here, Antonio?

FATHER ANTONIO
Let's stop you leaking on the
floor first, then I'll tell you.

DEACON GIALLO
Father...

FATHER ANTONIO
Ah, thank you.

He takes a bowl of stew and mug of steaming tea from Deacon Giallo. He offers the mug to Oliver first.

Oliver sniffs it, confused.

FATHER ANTONIO
Venetian traders brought it back
on the Silk Road, apparently they
all drink it out in the Far East.
Stirs the spirit.

Oliver sips, skeptical.

FATHER ANTONIO
What do you need for that?

Oliver eyes his wound.

OLIVER
Clean water and cloth. Steel and
fire...

Just then a HOODED FIGURE approaches -- THE ARCHER -- bow slung across their back, but also a steel rail and basic medical supplies in hand, as if anticipating Oliver's needs.

The sniper whispers in Antonio's ear, who glances at Oliver.

FATHER ANTONIO
I must go deliver last rites.
You're in good hands here.

Father Antonio leaves.

The sniper removes her hood: ALE ("Ali" 25-35) is a whip-smart, fiercely principled and beautiful peasant.

She eyes Oliver for a moment, sizing him up. Then she stuffs the steel rail into fire's embers beside him.

ALE
Can you take off your shirt, sir,
or do I need to cut you out of it?

Oliver rises slightly, wincing, and peels his shirt off. His taunted torso is riddled with cuts, scars and vicious bruises.

OLIVER
Are you a physician?

She kneels beside him, inspecting the wound.

ALE
I helped our barber sometimes, but
he's dead now. What is your name?

OLIVER
Oliver.

ALE
People call me Ale.

OLIVER
I'm sorry about your town, Ale.

She pauses, determined.

ALE
They'll soon be gone.
(beat)
Why did you come here?

OLIVER
They made themselves my enemy.

ALE
Because of that sword? That knight
did not handle it like his own.

Oliver just nods.

ALE
How many did you kill?

OLIVER
I don't know. Six or seven maybe.

ALE
Not enough.

OLIVER
No.

ALE
But better than most could manage.

She pulls the steel rail from the fire, now GLOWING HOT.

OLIVER
So your barber learned Arab
medicine?

ALE
In the Crusade. Turn over. Do you
want something to bite on?

OLIVER
No. May I ask you a question?

He turns to show the crossbow bolt's exit wound in his flank.

ALE
You may.

OLIVER
How did a peasant woman come to be
an expert bowman?

ALE
Same as anyone. Practice.

He smiles, she's as coy as him.

With no further warning, she presses the red hot tip into the
wound, searing it -- smoke rises.

Oliver endures it silently. She's a little impressed.
She gently turns him over to face her again. They're close.

OLIVER
(sincere)
Thank you... You saved my life. If
you would accept it, I am honor-
bound to offer you a boon.
Whatever you would ask, I am in
your service.

She holds his gaze, figuring him out.

ALE
A boon of service?

OLIVER
As you wish.

ALE
You are a knight who would be in
service to a peasant girl?

OLIVER
I am no knight.

ALE
But you are bound by some code?

He nods. She's intrigued.

ALE
Anything I want?

OLIVER
I cannot give you the sun and
stars, or make you Queen of
England, if that's what you're
thinking.

She leans closer, holding up the glowing rod.

ALE
Then what good are you?

She sticks it in the front entry wound, flesh sizzling.

She looks him in the eye.

He holds her gaze, without wincing.

OLIVER
Anything within my power to give.

Game recognizes game. Fire between them.

She removes the rod and puts it in the flames.

He picks up bandages and starts to wrap his own torso.

She watches him a moment, then her face hardens in thought.

ALE

And if I asked you to kill Werner
Von Urslingen, the leader of The
Red Company? What then?

A solemn beat. Oliver looks down a moment...

OLIVER

You would likely send me to my
death, but I would try, for you.

An electric beat as she takes this in, the power and
vulnerability he offers to her.

ALE

Then I will think on it carefully,
Oliver. In the meantime, you
should eat something.

She hands him the bowl of stew. Then she starts away.

He watches her head over to other groups, helping the wounded.

He sits back with a sigh. He looks at his hands, knuckles raw.

EXT. CATHEDRAL DOORS - NIGHT

Father Antonio opens the door and steps outside where he finds
Janick, unarmed and unarmored, but surrounded by armed knights.

FATHER ANTONIO

What can I do for you, my son?

JANICK

I demand to come inside.

Father Antonio is utterly unfazed by all the knights.

FATHER ANTONIO

It's the middle of the night, the
cathedral is closed.

JANICK

You let him in.

FATHER ANTONIO

I let in a man who needed
sanctuary. Do you need sanctuary?
It doesn't seem like these men are
threatening you -- it seems like
they're here to threaten me.

Janick's adrenaline is still pumping, hot with anger.

JANICK

Stand aside or I'll burn this
whole fucking place down.

FATHER ANTONIO

No, Janick, Earl of Pembroke, for
your sake, and the sake of your
innocent and neglected wife
Lucinda, your children Henry and
Emilia, your estate that earns
three hundred a year, and your
known associates...you will not.

Janick is shocked by his knowledge.

JANICK

Who are you?!

FATHER ANTONIO

My official title is now Bishop of
Iskenderun, but mostly people have
always called me the Shadow
Bishop. You know who I work for?

JANICK

...yes.

FATHER ANTONIO

You know his penalty if you lay a
hand on me, or force yourself
inside this house of god?

JANICK

Who's going to tell him what I did
if everyone's dead?

FATHER ANTONIO

My dear boy... When the
inquisitors come, someone always
talks.

Father Antonio glances at the Red Knights around Janick, who
takes his meaning. *Can he trust his own men against The Church?*

FATHER ANTONIO

Count yourself lucky. I've seen what that man in there can do with *that sword*. God help you all if he has to take it back. I suggest you give it to me, along with a token of apology that I can pass on. Maybe a finger, or better yet your thieving hand. And I will see to it that his anger is cooled and this whole affair is dropped.

Janick laughs with a sneer.

JANICK

I'm not giving anything to that bastard peasant. And I'm not afraid of you.

Father Antonio smiles politely.

FATHER ANTONIO

Then may God be with you, my son.

Father Antonio steps back inside and closes the door on them.

INT. CATHEDRAL - NIGHT

Oliver walks through the camp. He takes in the sight of wounded and scared townspeople.

A wife clutches the hand of her feverish, wounded husband. Three traumatized young women hold each other, crying.

Oliver seems inscrutable and present to it all. But he leans to help an OLD WOMAN struggling to carry supplies. She thanks him, finding compassion behind his eyes.

But then TWO LITTLE BOYS scamper past him, drawing his gaze.

One whispers to the other, conspiratorial, then draws a wooden toy sword. He swings it, shadow-fighting, showing the other.

Oliver stares at the back of his head. He looks familiar. The boy turns around. It is LUCA. He grins at Oliver.

LUCA

Will you stay, Olivero?! Please stay with us! You've got a lot to learn!

Oliver's heart cracks, shocked...

But then Father Antonio arrives at his side, turning him.

FATHER ANTONIO
Come. Let us talk.

Oliver glances back at the boy again, but it was not Luca...
Just a Volterra peasant child.

INT. PRIVATE CHAPEL - CATHEDRAL - MOMENTS LATER

Oliver sits with Father Antonio in a small, dim ante-chapel.

FATHER ANTONIO
He sent me to find you, Oliver. He
wants you back.

OLIVER
I paid my debt a hundred-fold.

FATHER ANTONIO
He was like a father to you.

OLIVER
I was his slave.

Father Antonio is caught between affection for Oliver and his
professional duties.

FATHER ANTONIO
He wants to pay you handsomely.
There's more work to be done.

OLIVER
The Church stands above all; kings
kneel before him. *Everyone* pays
fealty to him. How can there
possibly be more work left?

FATHER ANTONIO
You of all people should
know...there are always enemies to
power. On one side of him, the
Moslem world grows stronger again,
their alchemy and wisdom is beyond
ours. On the other side, the
godless Mongol Khan drives west
into the Rus, too close for
comfort; his forces are more
vicious than you can imagine. Even
here in Europe, clerics and
heretics whisper in the dark
against the authority of the
pontiff, against doctrine itself.

Oliver looks at his old friend.

OLIVER
Don't tell me you're actually a
believer now? A defender of the
"one true faith"?

Father Antonio smiles.

FATHER ANTONIO
I do the job that I'm good at,
that's all. I would advise that
you do the same.

OLIVER
Maybe that's exactly what I'm
doing.

Movement at the door. They turn to see Ale there.

ALE
We need help. We want these
pirates gone from our town.

She comes over, taking a seat across from Oliver.

OLIVER
With respect, I am here for the
one called Janick. My fight is not
with the entire Company.

ALE
With respect, it may become that
way.

Oliver glances from her to Father Antonio, sensing they know
something he does not.

FATHER ANTONIO
Janick is Werner Von Urslingen's
kin. His brother by marriage.

ALE
We have people here who would
fight back...

OLIVER
No...

ALE
We have good archers, we know the
rooftops. Volterra will rise up if
they're given hope.

OLIVER

Town peasants are no match for a company of professional warriors.

ALE

That's exactly what they think, and that's why we have the element of surprise. They barely consider peasants human, let alone able to fight back.

(beat, passionate)

But we are fighting *for something*. For love. Love of our home, our friends and our work, our way of life. There's power in that. They're only fighting for greed.

Father Antonio has a wry smile. Oliver catches it, realizing that these two have been conspiring since before he arrived.

OLIVER

What is it you want from me?

FATHER ANTONIO

Me?! Oh I only came here to bring you home, that's all. But I suppose...you will need your sword for the road ahead, so you'd better go fetch it first.

Ale spreads out a piece of canvas with A HAND-DRAWN MAP on it.

ALE

Janick will be in the *castello*. My archers can give you cover from above -- these are small family chapels. Consecrated ground. You move between these where they can't touch you, make your way up the hill. Father Antonio said you have infiltrated keeps before.

OLIVER

Did he now?

ALE

Get inside, get your sword, kill Janick, do whatever you want, I don't care. Just do one thing for us. Open the supply gate here.

She points to a SMALL DOOR on one side of the castle.

ALE
Give Volterrans the chance to take
back their town.

Oliver thinks for a moment. He looks at her.

OLIVER
This is what you'd ask as your
boon from me?

ALE
No... This is but a small favor.
Would you do it anyway?

Oliver looks into her eyes, finding fire and mettle there.

After a moment he relents with a nod. *Okay.*

OLIVER
I need a little rest first.

Ale gazes at him, impressed.

INT. CATHEDRAL - NIGHT

Oliver follows Ale across the church. Most people are asleep.

ALE
This way.

Trailing behind her, Oliver notices that the peasants who are still awake or tending the wounded BOW TO HER as she comes.

VARIOUS PEASANTS
Milady... Milady...

Ale heads up a narrow stairwell at the back of the church.

INT. PRIEST'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Ale opens the door for Oliver to enter a sparse bedroom in a priest's quarters attached to the back side of the church.

Just a bed, a lit fireplace, a desk.

ALE
Deacon Giallo offered up his cell.
It is quiet here at least.

OLIVER
Thank you, but I'm used to
sleeping on the ground. You should
take it and get some sleep...

Oliver stops as he notices a FUR-LINED CLOAK draped over a chair. A few pieces of FINE WOMEN'S JEWELRY on the desk, spilled from a small leather pouch...

He picks up A SIGNET RING with a CREST: THE VOLTERRA CREST.

He hears the DOOR CLOSE behind him.

He turns to see Ale still here, back to the door.

ALE

I don't want to sleep.

She's eyeing him intently. Just a hint of nerves.

OLIVER

What is it that you do want, Ale?
Or should I call you Lady
Alessandra di Volterra?

The room seems small now, intimate. But neither of them moves.

ALE

To look after my people.

OLIVER

A truly honorable desire.

ALE

One my father taught me long ago,
before years of war broke his
spirt, making him drunk and
tortured.

OLIVER

You fled your family's keep.

ALE

In hiding as a peasant, yes. I
will not be taken by brigands.

A long beat.

He holds compassion for her as she breathes out anger.

OLIVER

You are a brave and noble leader.
Your people are lucky to have you.

She just eyes him across the firelight.

OLIVER

What are you looking at, miss?

ALE

I'm looking at you, sir.

After a moment, he gives a faint and gentle smile.

ALE

All my life, I've been surrounded
by so-called nobles, knights of
low character. Since even before I
came of age, I've been watched as
a prize to be won by flattery,
deception or force. But you
offered your honest service,
without even knowing who I am.

(beat)

I am ready to request my boon.

OLIVER

What would you ask of me, my lady?

But she doesn't say anything...

She reaches up and undoes her peasant shirt, then the leather
hunting pants... Oliver is still, watching, as she gently
undresses in front of him, dropping her clothes in a pile at
her feet.

She takes a step toward him, naked and beautiful, standing tall
and unashamed.

ALE

We may both die tomorrow. You said
you'd serve me however I want or
need. Anything in your power to
give?

He nods.

ALE

Well... This is what I want, and
what I need.

A beat. Then he bows his head slightly, eyes locked on hers.

She steps into him and kisses him.

It's electric.

She pulls his clothes off him.

He lifts her against the wall.

They hardly take time to breathe, locked together.

They fall to the bed.

VARIOUS SHOTS:

It's hot and vigorous. Then slow and tender.

Bodies entwining and arching through the night.

She gasps, getting everything she wanted.

DREAM SEQUENCE

We're in Young Oliver's POV. Just a child, lost in the fields as rain pours down. Crying and alone. Bruised, broken.

We look up as a kind, NOBLE KNIGHT offers his hand down to us. The knight brings us indoors, giving us food.

The Noble Knight is training us with a sword. Teaching, nurturing. A gentle hand on our shoulder. Earnest support. We fight alongside the knight in battle, saving his life.

His heartfelt thanks. He gives us a sword... But now, years later, we're finding the NOBLE KNIGHT, murdered. Another MAN bursts in, hurling accusations and hatred at us.

Our POV as we're thrown over a wall, falling, landing in water. We're bleeding by the edge of the river. Someone in red robes approaches. A Cardinal, soothing us. Passing us a sword...

A POV montage as we kill knights on the battlefield, assassinate others in their homes. Merciless. Furious.

The images cut faster and blur together -- screams and violence at our hands. Then: Luca's family, dead.

INT. PRIEST'S BEDROOM - DAWN

Oliver gasps awake from the nightmare, eyes wide. He finds Ale beside him, watching him.

ALE

What did you dream of?

OLIVER

A monster.

ALE

What did it want?

OLIVER

To kill everyone that hurt it. To kill everyone that hurts anyone.

ALE
And you? Have you hurt people?

OLIVER
Yes.

ALE
I too have been haunted by this monster.

He looks at her. There is guilt, pain and fury in her too.

ALE
Brigands took my mother when I was but seven. I forced my father's sword master to train me. Years later, I found those brigands...

She doesn't need to finish. Her eyes tell of slaughter.

ALE
I was angry, full of hate. For years I let it consume me.

OLIVER
Aye. It is a potent tonic.

ALE
But in the end it weakens you.

Oliver looks away, knowing.

OLIVER
Someone used mine, and so me, for years. I tried to escape, to find peace. But my shadow is death, and it is cast everywhere around me.

ALE
The shadow of a man is not the man. Perhaps even a gift for violence can be used to noble end.

OLIVER
How?

ALE
There is good in your heart. I saw it, in how you looked at my people. In how you are looking at me. Trust that again.

OLIVER

It is gone from me, locked in a
dungeon somewhere. I don't know.

ALE

Then you must venture into the
shadows to find it. I know this,
because mine was also imprisoned,
not to punish, but to protect it.

OLIVER

You are a warrior. So it is.

ALE

I am a woman, in a world of boys.
(beat)
Your code chains you to others.

OLIVER

I was given a great honor, to join
an Order that --

ALE

That has bound you to service if
anyone helps you.

OLIVER

One good deed deserves another.

She puts her hand on his heart.

ALE

No. A good deed can be just that,
a gift. Let go of other people's
rules. Trust who you are beneath
the anger, in here.

She kisses him, with passion, then abruptly climbs out of the
bed, still naked.

ALE

Come. We have a long day ahead.

He gets up and puts on his trousers, while she puts on a shirt.

But as Oliver goes for his top, he halts... realizing:

Their door is AJAR... He signals her -- *freeze*.

The room is dark; dust motes swirl in a sliver of dawn light,
peeking past heavy curtains over the window.

Suddenly A DEMON launches out of the shadows behind the door!

It smacks him across the face with the butt of a GLAIVE -- a polearm weapon with a long spear handle and a vicious spiked blade at one end -- knocking him down hard!

Pieta slams the door shut, grinning behind her mask.

PIETA

Hello again, handsome.

Oliver ducks as Pieta SCREECHES and swings the long glaive around at him, SMASHING through bookshelves -- severed pages flutter through the air around them.

Oliver rolls away, but the long weapon takes up all the space in the room -- it bashes him into the wall!

But then ALE ATTACKS Pieta from the other side, skillfully striking with elbow and knee, battering Pieta backward.

It's immediately clear: Ale isn't just an expert archer. She's a trained fighter, through and through.

Pieta falls into a corner but swings the glaive round, Ale backflips away with impressive agility.

The three of them face each other, panting, half-naked. Pieta in her usual rags, Ale just in her shirt, Oliver with only his shepherd trousers on...

Pieta shifts back and forth, eyeing them both, relishing this.

PIETA

You are a busy boy, aren't you? I wonder, did you tell her about us?

OLIVER

We had a deal. I paid you...

PIETA

Oh that you did, and I enjoyed myself enormously.

Ale glances at Oliver, eyebrow raised.

OLIVER

No. They helped me get inside.

PIETA

Deep inside. But then along came a bigger boy with a bigger...purse.

OLIVER

Janick paid you...?

ALE

This is consecrated ground; you've attacked someone under the protection of sanctuary. Do you know what you're doing?

PIETA

You're in no state to lecture me on propriety, milady. Do I look like someone who gives a rat's tail about what is holy?

Her eyes gleam behind the demonic mask. She swivels the glaive back and forth -- WHUMP WHUMP WHUMP...

Then attacks again! She swings the glaive laterally --

Ale barely backbends under it -- Oliver deflects it into the desk, splinters flying --

Ale rushes in toward Pieta but --

Something grabs her leg, tripping her hard into the ground.

She rolls over to see MONICA scuttle out from UNDER THE BED, wielding DOUBLE HATCHETS!

Monica dives at her, hacking down with both hands!

Ale twists and crawls backward, barely evading as the axes smash the ground inches from her --

Oliver stops Monica's arm, kicking her away from Ale.

Ale yanks Oliver down as Pieta's glaive swipes over their heads. They evade blows that take chunks out of the walls --

Then Pieta brings it down with an overhead blow -- separating Oliver and Ale from each other.

Monica attacks Oliver with flashing axe swipes -- he rolls across the bed but tangles in the curtains, ripping them down -- using them to wrap one of Monica's hatchets, disarming her.

Dawn light streams in from the STAIN GLASS WINDOW.

Behind them, Pieta smacks her handle up into Ale's face then dives at her bare thighs, BITING ONE like a rabid monkey!

Ale screeches in pain, then kicks Pieta's footing away, and breaks the bottom half of her mask off with a hard strike.

Oliver blocks and sucker-punches Monica against a wall. She spits blood through the mask's mouth, but keeps attacking!

Oliver turns and heavy-kicks her across the room --

Monica crashes into the door beside Ale battling Pieta --

Ale kicks upward, pinning Pieta's neck against the wall with her foot in a high split...

A beat. Pieta's eyes trace all the way down Ale's bare leg with a perverse grin...

OLIVER

Ale!

Monica kicks Ale's standing leg out from under her --

Before she can strike down at Ale with a dagger --

Oliver hurls one of the hatchets, pinning the sleeve of Monica's dagger-arm to the door.

Oliver rushes at Monica, but Pieta blocks him with the glaive.

He halts, knife at Pieta's neck -- Monica rears to swing the hatchet at his neck but Ale traps her arm, arrow to her neck.

A four-way stand off, but Oliver and Ale have the upper hand.

BANGING on the other side of the door.

VOLTERRAN (O.S.)

Milady?! Lady Alessandra?!

The Demons are tired, battered. Backs to the door.

ALE

We have you. You won't kill us.

But Pieta just giggles.

MONICA

Oh but he didn't pay us to kill you...

PIETA

Just to get you outside of this church.

MONICA

And you have mistaken your footing, sir.

Ale glances at Oliver, realizing the window is behind him, as Monica produces a handful of soot and blows it into his face!

He falls off-balance -- Monica dives at Ale, grappling --

ALE

NO!!

Pieta charges Oliver with the glaive, using its length to block his escape as she shoves him backward --

SMASHING HIM THROUGH THE WINDOW!

EXT. BACKSIDE OF CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

In a hail of glass, Oliver tumbles backward over a roof protruding from the back of the church --

He falls, smashes through an awning, and hits the ground below.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Oliver groans, lying in the muck and dust. Buildings lean close around us; it feels like being a rat in a maze.

Oliver hears a snort. Slowly, he looks up to find:

JANICK, flanked by FOUR OTHER HULKING KNIGHTS... All of them are wearing FULL PLATE ARMOR.

Each one's personal armor is vivid and distinct:

- JANICK has a large family crest, intricate engraving
- BEC is coppery, sculpted lion pauldrons.
- REINOLD is riveted with spikes.
- ANTON is painted with medieval graffiti/slogans ("Born to Kill" in Latin, etc).
- BRIK has European-style plate armor but with stylistic flourishes reflecting his North African heritage.

A hint of fear on Oliver's face...

[So here's something the movies get wrong too much: a knight in full plate armor is A WALKING TANK. Swords simply do not pierce plate or even chainmail. But it does not mean armored knights are slow or lumbering -- armor was exquisitely bespoke and weight-balanced, allowing for FULL AND FAST MOBILITY.]

Oliver is badly outmatched, backed against the church...

JANICK

I do wonder, how on earth did you
become a Paladin? Where did they
find you? How do I find them?!

Because soon there will be a
vacancy amongst the twelve.

Oliver says nothing.

JANICK

You are quite remarkable muck, I will give you that. Why are you still fighting? All for this?

Janick holds up the sword.

OLIVER

You killed them.

JANICK

So sorry, old boy, I've killed a lot of people. Who exactly are you talking about?

OLIVER

(fury rising)

Their names were Gio, Chiara and Luca. They were a family. And for a moment, they were *my* family.

JANICK

Luca, Luca...? Oh my goodness! The rascal with the sling, at the farm?! Do you know, he got off a pretty good shot with that. It actually stung. His mother though, now she was a real fighter...

Beat. Janick smirks, letting it hurt.

OLIVER

I am going to kill you.

JANICK

You really think you have any chance against an armor corps? Kneel and make this easy.

Oliver is dead cold. He assumes a ready stance, unarmed.

In response, the knights all draw their weapons.

JANICK

Very well.

Janick snaps his helmet's faceplate down for battle --

A collective hush falls over the street...

Local peasants hold their breath, peeking from windows.

Tension builds around the spaghetti western stand-off.

Oliver's eyes, gazing through the dark slits of their helmets, into the soul of each opponent...

Fists grip hilts, shield-straps flex, breath steams...

Anton lunges forward -- Oliver bolts to meet him, ducking under a sword-swipe, tackling and toppling the knight backward --

Oliver grapples for his sword but there's no time --

Reinold swings A BIG WAR SLEDGE HAMMER! Oliver rolls out of the way as it smashes cobbles, but the knights close in --

Brik swings a scimitar sword, Oliver barely evades -- the sword clangs off Anton's armor instead --

Counter to every instinct, Oliver stays in close to them, using them as shields against each other. He leaps onto Brik's back, twisting and pulling him off-balance! Oliver scrambles, trying to grab a dagger at Brik's belt but --

Bec comes with a POLEARM -- Oliver drops behind Brik, using his armored body as a human shield to take the hit instead --

BRIK

Fuck, Bec!

WHAM! Oliver is body-checked by Reinold, spikes cutting him!

He tumbles backward, dazed. Janick comes at him hard and fast, wielding Poet and a shield --

Oliver ducks and evades a flurry of swipes, then gets in close, hitting Janick's helmet with his elbows --

Janick drops to his knees, but Oliver has to face the others:

It's a desperate, brutal scrap. Oliver barely evades, getting close to disarming one or another -- *he needs a weapon!* -- but he never has time before another comes at him!

He ducks their blades but is smashed around by their armored bulks as he searches for any way through.

Oliver hits the ground, but trips Brik with his legs, bringing him down then grabbing Brik in an ARM-BAR --

JANICK

Kill him already!

Oliver BREAKS BRIK'S ARM, twisting it around to use its armor as a shield against Reinold's incoming war hammer!

The blow caves in Brik's shoulder, he screams in his armor!

Oliver snatches Brik's scimitar and pries it into a small chink in Brik's armor at his groin, before ramming it home...

Brik squeals. Oliver withdraws the bloody scimitar in time to block Janick's incoming sword-swipes --

Oliver shoulder-checks Janick, knocking him back, twisting under Reinhold's hammer to come up behind him and --

He swings the scimitar like a baseball bat at Reinhold's helm, - *again and again* - beating him down, denting metal, until --

The scimitar snaps in half from the force! Oliver hurls it at Bec's head before she can strike him, grabs the WAR HAMMER from the ground at Reinhold's feet and --

Brings it round into Reinhold's head, CAVING IN HIS HELMET as he tried to get up. Blood oozes from the eye slit and neck.

Two down...

Janick charges Oliver with his shield, barging him backward--

They both topple down STONE STEPS leading to the lane below.

EXT. LOWER LANE - CONTINUOUS

Oliver tumbles into another lane, scrambling to his feet, hefting the war hammer as Janick, Bec and Anton come at him.

He deflects blows with the hammer as three knights attack, but he's forced backward toward an OLD STONE DOORWAY --

He swings the hammer around, smashing Anton's shield into splinters, knocking him down --

But as he raises the hammer's long handle to block -- Janick slices clean through it with Poet!

The next instant, Bec whips the butt-end of her polearm into Oliver's chest, smashing him through the doorway behind him...

INT. ROMAN BATHS - MOMENTS LATER

Janick, Bec and Anton follow through the doorway into an ANCIENT ROMAN BATHHOUSE. Old stone columns and faded mosaic murals around a couple small square pools, steaming from geothermal springs bubbling below.

Oliver is gone...

The knights turn, breathing hard, searching in the swirling steam that fills the room, condensing against their helms...

It's too hot; Janick removes his. It clangs to the floor.

The others follow suit, gasping.

Oliver attacks out of the fog.

He smashes an OIL POT over Bec's bare head, dazing her and dousing her in oil, using the distraction to disarm her --

He takes the polearm, expertly spinning it around himself like a kung fu master --

He smashes Anton back, then stabs its bladed end at Janick --

But it gets stuck in Janick's shield! With a swipe of Poet's blade, the polearm staff is severed...

Bec roars and tackles Oliver full-force --

They fall into one of the steaming pools!

Oliver is trapped underwater, pinned beneath her armored bulk, her knee into his neck, her own head just above the water --

JANICK

By god, will this filth ever stop?
Just finish it, Bec.

Oliver fights back, but underwater his blows lack force...

He's running out of air...

Bec grimaces, trapping his arm, solidifying her position.

Oliver's eyes glaze... Drowning... Starting to black out...

A door across the baths BURSTS OPEN!

A CROSSBOW BOLT hits Bec in the chest, knocking her backward --

Oliver bursts up, gasping, sucking in air --

Bec is winded too: the bolt lodged in her breastplate but didn't penetrate all the way through...

Janick and Anton turn to see A FEMALE KNIGHT IN FULL PLATE step into the room, dropping the crossbow and drawing a SPIKED HAMMER in one hand and a vicious ARMOR PICK in the other...

Even though she is wearing a full helmet, we can guess who it is. ALE's armor is sleek and badass, hugging her lithe frame.

Anton rushes at her --

Ale skillfully blocks his sword blow, spins and stabs the pike into a chink under his armpit with surgical precision -- hammers her spike into a chink at the back of his breastplate, then, as he gurgles with shock, she pikes his bare skull and kicks him into the pool.

Blood blooms in the water. Oliver clambers out and Ale flips Anton's sword up into his hands with her foot --

Bec attacks Ale next!

Though Bec is much larger, Ale fights her with brutal skill and now it's two against one as Oliver joins --

Oliver drops under a blow and smashes the hilt of the sword into Bec's knee, tripping her over him into Ale who pikes Bec's open palm into the wall -- pinning her there in shock --

In one smooth motion, Oliver stands, slicing the sword across the old stone walls, sending SPARKS FLYING which ignite Bec's oil-doused torso.

Across the pool, Janick watches in horror as Bec screams, burning alive inside her armor, pinned to the wall by her hand.

JANICK

Fuuuck this!

Janick hurls Poet away across the room, turns and runs.

ALE

Oliver, we have to go, right now!

Oliver staggers across and picks up his sword... Poet.

ALE

Oliver! Werner's men are on their way, I saw them! There's too many, we need to get back to sanctuary!

But Oliver is staring at his sword. His face is full of hate... He wants revenge. Ale takes his arm, pleading.

ALE

We don't have time. Leave him... You have what is yours. Please!

But Oliver is seeing red. *He makes his choice.* He breaks free of her grip and runs after Janick...

INT. ROMAN BATHS - CONTINUOUS

Oliver rushes through the next room, heading for an open door.

EXT. MARKET SQUARE - VOLTERRA - CONTINUOUS

Oliver bolts into the same small square that held the party --

Janick leaps at him from behind the doorway, bashing him down.

They tangle in the muck, but Janick uses his armor to pin Poet down while he batters Oliver in the face --

Janick draws his own HEAVY DAGGER to bring it down --

Oliver knees him and wrestles him, rolling over each other -- it's savage and close, a test of strength and will as Oliver tries to keep the dagger away, while reaching for his sword --

The world around them seems to BLUR AWAY. Oliver only sees Janick through his hateful eyes --

At last, Oliver rolls to Poet and rises again with his sword.

Oliver spins Poet fast around him, feeling its perfect heft in his hand. Janick draws a hatchet and rushes him...

Oliver swiftly slices clasps at Janick's armor, dropping his breastplate, SEVERs his left arm, then RUNS HIM THROUGH... But the sword lodges into a grate on the wall behind.

Janick grabs Oliver's collar, grinning as he coughs blood, and WRENCHES THEM BOTH SIDEWAYS --

A CRACK! They fall to the ground, Janick dead. But Oliver stares down in shock... A tinnitus whine in his ears...

POET'S BLADE HAS SHATTERED, a foot beyond the hilt. The other two pieces clatter to the floor, bloodied.

Oliver is numb, cradling his broken sword. Broken soul.

Time seems to stand still, in a daze. Then he screams with rage and STABS DOWN into Janick's body, AGAIN AND AGAIN! Venting all his pain and hate into the corpse, blood spraying his face.

ALE (O.S.)
(screamed)
Oliver!!

Her cry finally brings him out of his stupor...

He gets up, turning as the outside world comes back to him:

WERNER VON URSLINGEN is there in the middle of the square, on horseback, flanked by a DOZEN KNIGHTS and more soldiers.

ARCHERS have arrows notched and aimed at Oliver...

Dorian has Ale captive, on her knees, her helmet removed. He has a fistful of her hair in one hand and a knife at her neck.

Werner circles Ale on horseback, as Dorian cuts the straps of her armor, pulling it off, piece by piece.

WERNER

Lady Alessandra di Volterra. Word
of your beauty reached even
Munich, and yet the reports did
not do you justice.

TOWNSPEOPLE (O.S.)

(jeering)

Let her go! Let her go!

Werner sees townspeople gathering at the edges of the square. He nods to an archer, who lets an arrow fly -- killing a middle-aged protestor. The crowd falls quiet.

WERNER

You have killed many of my men.

ALE

I defended my people.

OLIVER

Release her.

Werner turns to face Oliver.

WERNER

And Oliver the shepherd, Oliver
the peasant... or should I say the
Paladin?

Oliver dares not move. He is unarmored, arrows pointed at him.

WERNER

I am Werner Von Urslingen. I am
honored to meet you. I respect
your commitment to your ideals.

Werner eyes Janick's body at Oliver's feet.

WERNER (CONT'D)

Even if it has cost me a few
leftenants and men-at-arms.

Oliver just glares at him.

WERNER

Janick was a stubborn fool and I hereby apologize for his uncouth behavior. I could use someone with tenacity. With real talent.

(beat)

Join our Company. Help us. Use your skill for us. I can grant you land and title, payment upfront, make you a true nobleman.

Oliver looks across at Ale, her eyes pleading.

ALE

Oliver, just go...

OLIVER

There is nothing noble about your business here. Let the lady go.

Werner pauses, disappointed.

The onlookers are angry. They throw vegetables at young Volterranean recruits, looking confused and lost, now clothed in Red Company colors.

TOWNSPEOPLE

Shame on you! Let her go!

Werner sees that tensions are rising around him.

WERNER

I have no quarrel with you, peasant. But this woman has defiled her station and title, and incited violence against me.

OLIVER

Don't...

Werner turns, raising his voice to the crowd.

WERNER

Hear me! We are the future. This is the fate of those who defy us.

He signals to Dorian.

Helpless, Ale stares at Oliver, tears in her eyes.

ALE

Just go, I beg you!

OLIVER

NO!

Dorian thrusts his dagger into Ale's back! The crowd screams in anguish as their leader falls to the ground, dead.

Oliver stares at her in shock and fury.

WERNER

Oh come on. This is the way of our world. Don't pretend like you're better than me. The Black Death himself? How many have you killed without even thinking about it?

OLIVER

I am thinking about it.

WERNER

Will you work with us or not?

Oliver looks at him with withering hatred. Werner glances across the square, seeing Father Antonio watching in horror.

WERNER

So be it. I know the Bishop of Iskenderun is here to collect you, that you are wanted in Avignon. I shall honor the wishes of the Holy See, and not detain you. You have what you came here for. Take it and get out of my town.

EXT. STREET TO MAIN GATES - VOLTERRA - DAY

Oliver walks alone toward the main gates, carrying his sword hilt and two other broken blade pieces. He is bloody, numb, lost in a churning, gut-wrenching pain.

Antonio waits for him up ahead.

FATHER ANTONIO

Oliver...

He joins Oliver, walking beside him, seeing the broken sword.

FATHER ANTONIO

Oliver, I am sorry. You can heal from this. A broken blade can be mended.

Up ahead, guards start to open the gates for him.

FATHER ANTONIO

I know what you must be thinking. And I warn you, do not try to avenge her. This is not your fight.

OLIVER
If not this, then what is?

FATHER ANTONIO
If you go up against Werner
directly, then you may never stop
fighting.

Oliver pauses, eyeing him, unsure what that means.

FATHER ANTONIO
She saved your life again, didn't
she? I saw her putting on her
armor. So you owe her another
boon, and she asked you to just
leave! I implore you: do as she
said. Come with me back to
Avignon.

[Note: At this time in history, the Pope was based in Avignon,
France -- not Rome.] Oliver looks at his friend.

OLIVER
I'm done taking orders. I'm done
holding debts. I'm done with the
code. There is something I must
do, because it is something only I
can do.

FATHER ANTONIO
There will be consequences, my
friend.

But Oliver doesn't hesitate.

OLIVER
I need you to write me bills of
credit from the Church Bank.

Father Antonio is apprehensive.

FATHER ANTONIO
In all these years, you've never
touched your account before.

OLIVER
I never needed to.

FATHER ANTONIO
You saved a considerable amount
over the years. How much do you
need?

Off Oliver's grim determination...

INT. DEMON CAVE HIDEOUT - NIGHT

A chest full of GOLD PIECES. A hand reaches in, greedily cupping them, showering them around...

PIETA laughs and hoots with glee, turning to hurl gold pieces at Monica, drinking fine wine by the fire where a suckling pig is roasting. Baskets overflowing with fresh cheeses and fruit.

PIETA

London! I want to see London,
dearie. Oh there must be good
spooking and spoiling to be had
about the lanes of England.

MONICA

Nay, Jerusalem. We may live as
Holy Queens in the Holy Land!

PIETA

Pffft, there be no sport in
holiness. I want to romp and rave
and you do too deep down, I know,
it'd do you good too.

Monica smirks. Pieta whirls over to her in her rags.

MONICA

Aye... What do you know?

Pieta strokes the older woman's thigh, moving upward.

PIETA

We can buy it all.

MONICA

Anything we want.

They smile at each other, faces close in the hot dark.

PIETA

Anyone we want.

A SOUND IN THE DARK -- the crack of a stone fall. They both turn, instantly on alert. Monica grabs a sword and a torch. Pieta a loaded crossbow.

Monica moves toward the sound's passageway. Her torchlight only shines a little way in before it is swallowed by darkness...

MONICA

Who goes there?

Behind her, Pieta suddenly sees A LARGE SHADOW flit past another passageway beside her!

She turns and SHOTS THE BOLT! It clangs into bare rock.

Pieta snatches up an axe as Monica rejoins her...

PIETA
Someone is here.

They hear CLANGING from the caves. Rhythmic thumping, moving around them, echoing, as if from multiple sources.

MONICA
Or something.

It's ominous and terrifying. As they stare down a passageway --

A SHADOW flits behind them and the FIRE IS SNUFFED OUT BY SAND! Only embers glowing. Only Monica's single torch left.

MONICA
What are you? Show yourself!

They are afraid. Spinning in the darkness.

A rush of air, two SWIPES!

SEVERED HANDS fall to the ground, still clutching weapons.

Monica and Pieta SCREAM, falling and clutching bleeding wrist stumps. The torch sputters on the ground beside them.

They both look up, wide-eyed in horror...

Out of the flickering dark, a DARK FIGURE emerges, clad in black, with a HORRIFYING DEMON MASK for a face.

EXT. HILLTOP HAMLET - LECCHI - ESTABLISHING

A tiny village perched on a peak in the Chianti hills. It's raining. A few villagers coming home from the fields.

I./E. BLACKSMITH - LECCHI - DAY

SEBASTIAN is an older blacksmith, hammering and shaping a farmer's rake into shape at his forge in an open-walled shack.

He hears a knock at the doorway.

SEBASTIAN
(French accent)
Gloria, I told you! As beautiful
and delectable as you are, you
can't keep distracting me from my
work.

Hearing no answer, he turns to see Oliver in the doorway.

SEBASTIAN
Olivier?

OLIVER
Ciao, Sebastian.

SEBASTIAN
Come in, come in out of the rain.

Sebastian sets his work down. He picks up a bottle and glasses and pours some wine. But Oliver declines.

OLIVER
You look well.

SEBASTIAN
This is good country.

OLIVER
Aye, that it is.

SEBASTIAN
What are you doing here?

Oliver looks around at the humble forge.

OLIVER (SUBTITLED)
(in French)
I need armor.

SEBASTIAN (SUBTITLED)
*I am a village blacksmith. I don't
make arms here.*

Oliver's look suggests he should reconsider. Sebastian sighs.

SEBASTIAN
I knew this day would come.

OLIVER
I need a full suit of plate.
(off his look)
It doesn't need to be art, it just
needs to work. Light and agile. I
must be able to move. I can pay
accordingly.

Oliver pulls out a BILL OF CREDIT from the CHURCH BANK, written out, signed and stamped with Father Antonio's wax seal. He puts it down on the table.

Sebastian looks at it. His eyes go wide.

SEBASTIAN
You would give this much? Just to
me?

OLIVER
I need it tomorrow.

Sebastian laughs.

SEBASTIAN
Olivier, it is impossible. Even if
I could work that fast, I don't
have the raw materials here to
make tailored plate.

Oliver turns away, glancing outside. He CLICKS with his mouth.

Sola the Donkey trots over, pulling a CART. Oliver throws back
the cart's canvas tarp to reveal a PILE OF ARMOR AND WEAPONS.
All taken from the Demon Women's cave.

SEBASTIAN
Where did you get all that?

OLIVER
I made a deal with some devils.
Can you do it?

Sebastian looks at the bill of credit again.

SEBASTIAN
Three days. You will assist me,
and I can make you something. It
won't be perfect, but it will be
something. What is this for?

Oliver takes off his wet jacket to get to work. Underneath,
Oliver removes the broken hilt of Poet from his belt and stabs
it blade-down into the bench.

Sebastian stares at it, knowing what it means to Oliver.

SEBASTIAN
Olivier... Do you also want to--?

Oliver starts heaving a plate cuirass from the cart.

OLIVER
No. It stays as it is.

MONTAGE SEQUENCE

Sebastian and Oliver work through the night.

Sebastian measures Oliver's dimensions.

They melt down the stolen armor in red hot furnaces.

In Volterra, The Red Company sort and organize plundered gold and valuables into huge carts at the castle keep.

Sebastian hammers metal on his anvil, while Oliver turns it.

Werner gives orders in the Volterra keep as his men continue to load supplies, getting ready to move out again soon.

Oliver sews leather together against riveted metal.

Sebastian quenches hot steel in oil, moving to the next piece.

Oliver and Sebastian take turns napping and working. Oliver carries wood and coal for the furnace. Days and nights pass.

Sebastian checks the fit of greaves on Oliver's legs. We don't see the full fit but he nods... It is good.

I./E. BLACKSMITH - LECCHI - DAWN

Sebastian is exhausted, watching as Oliver finishes loading armor into a burlap sack.

SEBASTIAN

It will blunt wolves' teeth. That much is certain.

OLIVER

Thank you, Sebastian.

SEBASTIAN

I will lift a sword beside you, if you ask. I fear I owe you still.

OLIVER

No. I'm done with debts.

Sebastian picks up the broken hilt of Poet. Gives it to Oliver.

SEBASTIAN

Then, next time you give me enough time to make real art.

Oliver smiles. He nods and shakes his hand.

EXT. SEWER ALLEY - VOLTERRA - DAY

Oliver crawls out of the sewer grate, dragging the sack behind.

EXT. CATHEDRAL - DAY

Red Company soldiers pass by on patrol... Then Oliver steps out of the shadows. He peers up toward the church...

Ale's body is hanging from the gallows outside.

MOMENTS LATER

A blade slices rope; Ale's body falls to the ground. Oliver covers her with a blanket, then lifts her body in his arms.

INT. PRIVATE CHAPEL - CATHEDRAL - LATER

Oliver rests a hand on the covered body, now laid out beneath an altar. He gently kisses her forehead through the cloth.

He turns and sees LUCA beside him, just as they stood in the fields, practicing the sling while watching the sheep, except now the scene plays out here in the dark church.

OLIVER
You're holding back.

LUCA
I don't want to get hurt again.

Luca rubs a small welt on his temple, a little forlorn.

Oliver reaches in his small leather satchel, pulls out the last round slinging stone. Holds it out to Luca.

Luca reaches to take it, but Oliver pulls it back.

OLIVER
Why do you want to learn to sling?

LUCA
I want to be able to fight.

OLIVER
Why?

LUCA
Because it's dangerous these days,
there are brigands about and --

OLIVER
No. Fear is no cause to fight.
(long beat)
What does a shepherd do?

Luca looks back into the cathedral's refugee camp.

LUCA
Protects them.

OLIVER
Why?

Luca thinks for a moment.

LUCA
They feed us and clothe us.
They're like family. We look after
them because... we can.

Oliver eyes him. He nods, then gives Luca the stone.
He stands up and finds Father Antonio at the door, watching.

INT. LORD'S QUARTERS - VOLTERRA KEEP - DUSK

Werner is in his full armor, along with his closest knights
including Hamid and Dorian.

HAMID
All told, I estimate twelve
hundred pounds of gold alone
gained here.

WERNER
Taking this town was good
business. A hundred to each of
you.

DORIAN
Thank you, my lord.

HAMID
And the men-at-arms?

WERNER
Just give them the casks from the
town cellars, that's enough.

HAMID
There is some dissatisfaction,
sir. *Some of them* feel... that
they are not paid enough.

WERNER
We are noblemen. Knights. We're
the ones here, in this room,
making the decisions that make
this Company what it is. The
spoils go to us. If they don't
like it, they can go find another
job.

HAMID
Of course, sir.

WERNER
At dawn we go to meet the main
force and drive for Pisa. In the
meantime, double check the armored
carts, bring the footmen inside
the castle walls for the night. I
want everyone in formation when we
ride out.

EXT. THE CASTLE GATES - VOLTERRA - NIGHT

The small castle sits on the hill above town. A horse and cart
comes up the lane from below and stops at the front gate.

GATE GUARDS approach the driver of the cart.

GATE GUARD
What do you think you're doing?

The driver removes his hood to reveal it's Father Antonio.

FATHER ANTONIO
I'm taking the body of Lady
Alessandra di Volterra to her
family's tomb, in there.

Gate Guard pulls back the blanket, eyeing the body beneath.

GATE GUARD
She was supposed to stay hung.

FATHER ANTONIO
My boy, as a Bishop, the matter of
this woman's soul lies under my
jurisdiction. Duke Urslingen will
agree, and moreover, he will join
me in laying a fellow noble to
rest. Or are you questioning the
authority of the Church?

The guards glance at each other, nervous. One nods to the
other, who goes to raise the portcullis.

Father Antonio drives the cart through the gates.

As it rolls into the courtyard, we drop below the wheels...

Oliver clings underneath the cart. He drops and rolls out from
the wheels, pulling his large burlap sack from the cart with
him, and rushes away into the shadows, unseen.

He stops at a SIDE DOOR in the castle walls. With practiced skill and a metal tool, he picks the lock and slips inside.

He leaves the door hanging open...

INT. DARK SPIRAL STAIRWELL - NIGHT

In a dark corner, Oliver drops his burlap sack with a clunk. He pulls off his cloak and jacket, then rips open the sack...

HIS ARMOR glimmers inside.

QUICK SHOTS. SUIT UP SEQUENCE:

Just glimpses, as he pulls on chainmail and base layers, then piece by piece, buckles on PLATE ARMOR. Attaching greaves (lower legs) above leather boots, poleyn (knee guards), cuisses (thighs), cuirass (torso), pauldrons (shoulders), rerebrace, vambrace, couter (arm pieces), reticulated gauntlets.

We don't get the full picture yet. His hand picks up the broken half-sword that was called Poet, its remaining foot-long blade wielded point-down like a vicious dagger...

INT. CELLAR - NIGHT

THREE FOOT SOLDIERS are loading wine barrels to take with the Company, helping themselves as they go, laughing and bantering.

At one end of the cellar, a door bursts open.

They all turn to look.

Emerging out of the black doorway, a dark knight...

Oliver's armor is unadorned and unpolished, dull brushed metal, but it fits like a bespoke suit, plates overlapping and moving perfectly over each other. It's plain and nimble and lethal. His helmet is intimidating, cool as hell and instantly iconic.

FOOT SOLDIER

It's him...

Terrified, they scramble away to the opposite door!

Oliver hurls Poet -- it spins across the cellar -- then thunks into the back of the nearest soldier. He falls with a gurgle.

Oliver RUNS after them, as freely as an unarmored man. He snatches Poet from the dead man's back as he keeps going.

INT. LORD'S QUARTERS - VOLTERRA KEEP - LATER

Hamid is writing in a ledger at the desk, doing accounting work in the lord's study when he hears:

Outside the door, THE SOUND OF FIGHTING, WEAPONS CLANGING, MEN SCREAMING, MEN DYING... It's coming closer, getting louder...

Alarmed, Hamid quickly gets up, grabbing his curved sword --

The door crashes inward, off its hinges.

Oliver shoots a crossbow bolt into Hamid's gut -- the force smashes him across the desk, papers flying.

Hamid topples to the ground, writhing in pain, bleeding.

Oliver walks over and grabs him. Poet to his neck.

OLIVER

Where's Werner von Urslingen?!

Hamid's terrified eyes flit to the doorway... Outside the study, he sees half a dozen freshly bleeding corpses...

INT. DINING HALL - NIGHT

A simple medieval feast hall -- not large or lavish, this is just a small provincial castle. A wide roaring fireplace, some long tables, and two mezzanine galleries above it.

Werner and his knights eat at the top table, men-at-arms and foot soldiers at the lower tables.

The banquet is interrupted as a soldier stumbles in, bleeding from his side, slipping on his own blood.

A hush falls. The knights stare.

BLEEDING SOLDIER

He's here, my lord! He's in the castle! He's coming!

DORIAN

Who is coming?

WERNER

The peasant.

Werner keeps a look of mere mild irritation for show, but behind his eyes, we see a flicker of real worry.

WERNER

What are you waiting for? Go take care of this rat.

His knights get up, pulling on gauntlets and gear.

Werner glances at Dorian, who stays seated beside him.

INT. STONE STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Oliver hurries down stone steps, then exits into:

INT. TIGHT CORRIDOR - NIGHT

A long, narrow corridor with bare stone walls, vaulted ceilings, lit by torches in sconces along its length.

But he halts because, coming the other way, are EIGHT OF WERNER'S KNIGHTS. Elites, in armor, looking for him.

They all stop, staring at each other.

KNIGHT 1

Surrender.

Oliver watches them as they inch closer.

His calm determination makes them uneasy.

KNIGHT 1

Come on. There's a lot of us.

Oliver grips Poet, broken blade downward.

He snaps his helmet's faceplate down for battle --

Which cues a THUMPING TECHNO PULSE on the soundtrack...

The music builds. We want that beat drop. Here it comes...

OLIVER CHARGES LIKE A LION.

It's carnage in the tight corridor. He smashes into the first knight, knocking the ones behind like dominoes --

Oliver is quick and lethal, pinning KNIGHT 1 with his knee and stabbing Poet through the eye-slit of his helmet! Blood spurts.

The standing knights try to draw and swing longswords but they awkwardly bump against the ceilings and walls --

Oliver ducks into them with Poet in one hand, armor-hammer (a curved spike opposite a flat head) in the other --

He stabs through chinks, knocking them back, cutting straps, throwing them off-balance, hitting, always striking --

Now we start to see... Using Poet while it's broken blade is shorter is an advantage in the tight spaces of a castle...

It's a brutal close-quarters brawl, where the knights' numbers don't count for much as they keep getting in each other's way.

Oliver steps over toppled knights, shoulder-checking others as he stabs and strikes.

His hammer caves in helmets, dents leg pieces, breaking bones beneath even if it doesn't pierce metal.

His broken blade finds chinks and weak spots --

He stabs up into groins or armpits--

He pries open neck armor like he's shucking giant oysters.

The knights land some blows too -- but their longswords are the wrong weapon in here, so they can't get full power --

Their blades crash against his armor. Sparks fly in the dark.

Oliver's armor does its job, deflecting and protecting enough for him to keep spinning and moving.

One by one, the knights fall beneath Oliver.

He uses all parts of his weapons. The butt of his hilt breaks fingers into the wall. Poet's crossguard traps swords and stabs into eyeballs. Its blade slices any exposed meat.

Blood spatters against the walls.

He drives forward through the scrum like a linebacker.

A furious, relentless force.

And then, with a huge blow, he breaks the point of his hammer THROUGH the last helmet...

Oliver stumbles free of the bodies behind him, breathing hard. He leans against the wall, exhausted, catching his breath.

EXT. THE CASTLE GATES - VOLTERRA - NIGHT

At the main gates, we find the Gate Guards lying dead, with arrows in their chests, as someone RAISES THE PORTCULLIS.

Inside the courtyard, the SIDE DOOR is still hanging open, as Oliver left it. An UNKNOWN FIGURE slips inside, followed by another, then another... Ale's fighters.

INT. DINING HALL - MOMENTS LATER

Werner, Dorian and a couple other knights remain eating.

DORIAN

Perhaps we should leave, sir.

Men-at-arms sit at the lower tables, casting uneasy glances at their superiors. Werner knows he must show strength.

WERNER

No. We are knights, we do not flee. We finish this here.

OLIVER (O.S.)

Werner von Urslingen!!

Hearing Oliver's shout, everyone looks toward the closed doors.

In the sudden quiet, they hear footsteps and dragging metal...

Oliver pushes open the double doors. He paces in, dragging a longsword taken from the dead along the ground behind him.

He's a ghoulish sight: blood dripping down his armor plates.

OLIVER

It's time for you to pay the cost of your business here.

Werner is a little impressed, a little unnerved, a lot angry.

He rises from his seat, and all the men-at-arms do likewise.

WERNER

You have no power to make demands of me. I am the Duke of Urslingen, I am The Red Company! And we are freedom and power, beyond kings and borders; people want what we have! Our numbers are always going up! We are profit, we are progress! You are just a peasant!

Oliver says nothing, cold and steeled.

He raises the longsword up, crossguard framing his helmet's eye slits, and gives a small nod. A salute of respect to the enemy.

Once again, a HEAVY TECHNO BATTLE BEAT builds... heaving like a heartbeat full of hate, pulsing in Oliver's temple...

WERNER

Tear him to pieces!

Oliver rushes forward, revving up the longsword in his hand with a twirl, as THE TWENTY MEN-AT ARMS swarm him.

[Note: This is Oliver fighting with his weapon of choice... a true knight's weapon... a TWO-HANDED LONGSWORD. Up until now, he's been forced to use "lesser" weapons, or broken Poet...]

This isn't even his own sword, and yet he explodes into the tangle of foot soldiers like a glorious angel of death --

The blade flashes and slashes, blocking and cutting through soldiers relentlessly, severing limbs, sending blood geysering like in the old samurai movies --

The techno klaxons roar, the beat pounds, and Oliver seems to move and cut to the beat, dancing like some righteous rave god.

Again his armor works its magic, covering Oliver's imperfections and mistake -- and yes he does make some --

He's knocked this way and that by some blows, almost brought down, but their weapons clang and spark off his plate --

Now he is the walking tank.

He drops and rolls, slicing outward from his knees, severing legs and feet, spinning up again to take heads and arms.

It's like fighting a blender.

Oliver takes down half of the men.

WERNER watches with increasing anger...

He looks upward, at the two mezzanines above...

WERNER

Now! Loose and don't stop!

INT. MEZZANINE - DINING HALL - SAME TIME

Suddenly a phalanx of ARCHERS steps forward, taking aim down into the dining hall...

INT. DINING HALL - CONTINUOUS

Oliver sees what's coming. He stomps down on the shield of a fallen soldier, flipping it up onto his arm as --

The archers start firing and reloading! A non-stop barrage of arrows rains down from above.

Arrows lodge into and through Oliver's shield. Some slam into Oliver's exposed armor, clanging off it but hurting.

Arrows hit some of the soldiers trying to attack Oliver.

Dorian turns to Werner, sickened.

DORIAN

My lord, those are our men. They
don't have armor.

WERNER

You're right. You lot get in there
and finish it.
(to archers)
Keep shooting!!

Dorian glances at the FOUR REMAINING KNIGHTS. They pull on their helmets, grab their weapons and move into the fray.

Werner backs away against the wall, watching, manic.

OLIVER fights amid a hail of arrows, soldiers still attacking.

He cuts some down, but each movement leaves him vulnerable and more arrows slam into his armor, some lodging in it.

But more soldiers are killed by their own side's arrows too.

The knights are coming in fast.

Oliver hurls the shield at one's head, and attacks first.

Arrows hailing around them, Oliver parries and smashes his armored assailants with heavy blows followed by precise, weak-point-finding slices --

He trips one knight, grabbing him and impaling his face down into the arrows stuck in the floor.

He snaps off other arrows and stabs them into armor cracks.

The last of the foot soldiers goes down.

The floor is slippery and uneven with severed bodies, the room now a pincushion of arrows.

An arrow hits Oliver's gauntlet, causing him to drop the sword. Another hits his helmet hard enough to concuss...

He falls to his knees.

WHAM! Dorian's sword hits him in the chestplate like a bat, denting it, sending him tumbling backward...

Sprawled on the floor, arrows keep slamming into his armor, like being shot in a bulletproof vest over and over --

Dorian is the last remaining knight. He looms toward Oliver.

INT. MEZZANINE - DINING HALL - SAME TIME

Suddenly one archer after another is HIT BY ARROWS! And we find VOLTERRAN PEASANTS rushing in, shooting!

INT. DINING HALL - SAME TIME

Werner looks up, seeing that he is losing the advantage.

He turns and flees, shouting to aides.

WERNER

My horse! Saddle my horse!

The arrow stoppage gives Oliver just enough time to get up before Dorian attacks, swinging his massive sword.

Oliver ducks and evades, using his gauntlets to deflect some blows aside -- he draws Poet and his hammer --

But Dorian smashes the hammer from his hand, grabs him and hurls him across a dining table. He kicks the table, pinning Oliver against the wall, and then --

WHAM! Dorian's sword PIERCES THROUGH the dented, damaged breastplate into Oliver's side!

Oliver grabs Dorian's sword arm, holding it still, and he stabs Poet into Dorian's inner forearm, slicing through straps, leather, and arteries... Blood gushes out.

Dorian grabs Oliver's neck with his other huge hand, crushing and choking...but he bleeds out before he can finish...losing consciousness. Dorian falls dead.

Oliver looks across the room, seeing that Werner is gone.

He yanks the sword out of his side with a cry of pain.

He starts after Werner, while above him, the townspeople finish off the survivors with their arrows.

I./E. STABLES - DAWN

Werner rushes in, and mounts his battle horse.

WERNER

Out of my way!

He kicks it forward, barging past stable hands.

INT. CORRIDORS - SAME TIME

Oliver runs, clutching his side, through the castle. He pushes through the pain, breaking into a full sprint!

EXT. OUTER RING OF CASTLE - DAWN

Werner gallops from the stables, across the courtyard.

INT. WINDOW CORRIDOR - SAME TIME

Oliver sprints down a corridor past stain glass windows, through which we see Werner riding this way!

EXT. THE CASTLE GATES - VOLTERRA - SAME TIME

Oliver bolts outside through a door, but he's too late --

Werner's horse flies past him, heading for the gates ahead...

The portcullis is still open. His escape is clear.

Oliver reaches in a pouch at his side, and takes out the SHEPHERD SLING... The same one he and Luca used.

He loads A STONE, swings the sling round and round, faster and faster, eyes set on Werner as he gallops away --

Oliver looses the stone!

It cracks Werner hard in the back of the head, knocking him from his horse -- he crashes to the dirt.

Werner rolls away, trying to get up, but his arm is broken. He tries to draw his sword but Oliver arrives --

He smashes his armored knee into Werner, trapping his arm, punching him down.

For all his cruelty, Werner is no match for our hero.

Oliver removes his own helmet and batters Werner into the dirt with it. He pins Werner, grabs Poet and is about to strike --

WERNER

Wait! Look at this!

Werner pulls off his glove, holding up a RING on his finger.

WERNER

Look at it. You know what that is!

Oliver recognizes the ring, and hesitates.

WERNER

Of course you do. That's a Papal seal, above my crest. I am his godson. I am under his protection. That's right. All that work you did for our Holy Father, to bring him to power, it also made me. Who do you think funded the company in the beginning?

Oliver is torn, but he still grips broken Poet above Werner.

WERNER

If you kill me, you will make an enemy of your former master. You will be excommunicated, and the inquisitors will hunt you forever. Nowhere in Europe will be safe for you.

(softening)

But... If you let me go, you can take whatever gold you want, and I will still make you landed, I will still make you a knight, like me.

A moment of silence. Oliver looking at him.

He has made his choice.

OLIVER

You are no knight.

He stabs Poet's broken blade into Werner's neck.

Werner gurgles in shock and dies.

Oliver removes his blade and stands up. He glances over at the gates, where townspeople are watching, apprehensive.

A small nod to them. It's alright now.

Emboldened, they head through the gates and on into the castle, to take back what is theirs.

EXT. GRAVES - PEASANT FARM - DAY

Oliver is back in simple shepherd clothes, bandages and vicious bruises visible beneath them. He is laying flowers on the graves of Luca, Chiara and Gio.

He closes his eyes, hand on his heart. A silent prayer.

He hears movement beside the burned-out house.

OLIVER
How now, Nonna?

The old woman appears, hooded and weird as ever.

NONNA
Hail to thee, oathbreaker,
boontaker, strikegiver.

This time, Oliver will not be unnerved.

OLIVER
They are avenged.

NONNA
Pfft, what virtue is in vengeance
or violence? Trouble brews and
stews from the ewes to you. A new
path appears. What will you do?

The ancient woman bleats like a sheep, then she shuffles away, muttering to herself.

EXT. PEASANT FARM - LATER

Oliver places the broken pieces of Poet on a piece of canvas.

Broken sword. Broken soul.

He wraps the bundle up, then stuffs it beneath a saddle bag and sleeping mat mounted on Sola the Donkey.

He looks around at the beautiful, burned out farm. The only place he knew peace.

He leads Sola away, but at the edge of the farm, he's met by a rider coming down the path. Father Antonio dismounts.

FATHER ANTONIO
Hello, Oliver.

OLIVER
Father.

Antonio produces a small rolled note, the kind they attach to the legs of trained pigeons.

FATHER ANTONIO
The messenger birds are already
flying. They will be coming for
you.

Oliver takes the note, and looks at it.

FATHER ANTONIO

I did warn you. I wish you had
just come with me, my old friend.
But... I respect your decision.

OLIVER

Thank you, for what you did.

FATHER ANTONIO

Oh I did nothing but bury a true
noblewoman with honor.

(beat)

The price of freedom will be high.
I fear all the world shall be your
enemy.

Oliver nods. He knows. After a moment, he looks at Antonio.

OLIVER

When you get back to him, you may
tell the Holy Father: I will see
him in Hell.

Antonio can't help but smile.

Oliver mounts up on his donkey, and starts away down the road.

Father Antonio watches him go. A peasant. A Paladin.